ARMOR AT WAR SERIES

7042

PANZERS

OF THE ARDENNES OFFENSIVE 1944-45

Tom Cockle

CONCORD
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Introduction

During the summer of 1944, the German Army was reeling back in disarray on all fronts. After suffering catastrophic defeats on the Eastern and Western Fronts and steadily losing ground in Italy, Adolf Hitler devised a plan that he felt could dramatically change the course of the war for Germany. The first mention of his plan to attack through the Ardennes towards Antwerp, was made during a conference with Generaloberst Alfred Jodl, Chief of the OKW Operations Staff, on 16 September 1944, while at his headquarters in East Prussia. On 25 September, he provided a detailed assessment of Germany's overall situation in a meeting with Jodl and Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the OKW. He concluded that a surprise attack against the weakest point of the American lines, during poor weather conditions to neutralize enemy air operations, provided the best opportunity for success. As six to eight weeks would be needed to raise and re-equip the necessary forces required for the undertaking, late November would be the earliest time the operation could begin. Jodl was instructed to prepare an operational plan while Keitel would work out the logistics.

The assault force would be made up of three armies under Generalfeldmarschall Walther Model's Heeresgruppe B. Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich's VI.Panzer-Armee, with four Panzer and five infantry divisions, would attack on the northern flank; General der Panzertruppen Hasso von Manteuffle's V.Panzer-Armee, with three Panzer and four infantry divisions, would attack through the center; and General der Panzertruppen Erich Brandenberger's VII.Armee, with one Panzer and six infantry divisions, would attack on the southern flank. Additionally, three Panzer-Divisions were held in reserve to exploit any breakthrough. It was intended that these three armies would thrust through the U.S. First Army units holding the front line from Monschau in the north to Echternach on the Luxembourg border, cross the Meuse River and continue on to Brussels and Antwerp.

On 15 December, eve of the historic offensive, code-named 'Wacht am Rhein' (Watch on the Rhine), Hitler held a final conference with his staff at his new temporary headquarters, the Führerhauptquartier 'Adlerhorst', located near Bad Nauheim, north of Frankfurt. Reports confirmed several days of bad weather could be expected, effectively grounding enemy aircraft. That evening he dined with his secretaries and, as he retired at 5:00 a.m., one hundred miles to the west, thousands of German troops attacked along a weakly held eighty-five mile sector of the four hundred and fifty miles of the British-American front. Hitler's last gamble in the west had begun.

The Attack Begins

The German attack began with a massive hour-long artillery barrage that devastated the American lines, creating panic and confusion. All except in front of von Manteuffle's V.Panzer-Armee, where he had ordered a short 20-minute barrage against selected targets to help preserve the element of surprise. Although the battle raged all along the front, the disruption in telephone communications led the American units to believe the attacks were local and prevented them from understanding the true nature of the situation until later in the day. One American journalist wrote that, "with the exception of Pearl Harbor, never had the American troops been thrown into greater confusion by an attack as that mounted in December 1944".

The most powerful of the three German armies was VI.Panzer-Armee. That morning, 685 guns and howitzers of various caliber and 340 multiple rocket launchers were directed on the American 2nd and 99th Infantry Divisions positions between Höfen and the Losheim Gap. For almost an hour without interruption, shells screamed over the heads of the massed German divisions. As abruptly as the bombardment began, it ended, and thousands of German Panzer and Volks-Grenadiers advanced under the glow of searchlights bounced off the low clouds, bathing the battlefield in artificial moonlight.

Protecting the northern shoulder was LXVII.Armeekorps, commanded by Generalleutnant Otto Hitzfeld. Comprised of the understrength 272. and 326.Volks-Grenadier-Divisions, and reinforced with 3.Panzer-Grenadier-Division and 246.Volks-Grenadier-Division from 15.Armee, they were assigned to advance from Monschau through Eupen and Verviers to Liège. As 272.Volks-Grenadier-Division was already engaged at the beginning of the offensive, 326.Volks-Grenadier-Division carried out the attack on Monschau on its own, suffering heavy casualties, and although 3.Panzer-Grenadier-Division and 277.Volks-Grenadier-Division from 1.SS-Panzer-Korps were thrown behind them, the attack failed. 272.Volks-Grenadier-Division returned to 15.Armee while 326-Volks-Grenadier-Division was transferred to V.Panzer-Armee.

I.SS-Panzer-Korps and Kampfgruppe Peiper

It was expected 1.SS-Panzer-Korps would achieve the decisive breakthrough needed for success of the operation and for this, was given the greatest concentration of forces. Commanded by SS-Gruppenführer Hermann Preiss, they had at their disposal 1.SS-Panzer-Division 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler', reinforced with s.SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitler Jugend', 12. and 277.Volks-Grenadier and 3.Fallschirmjäger-Divisions. Following behind would be SS-Obersturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny's Panzer-Brigade 150, whose mission was to infiltrate the American lines dressed in American uniforms and capture two Meuse bridges meanwhile disrupting enemy communications and creating confusion.

Kampfgruppe Müller, from 12.SS-Panzer-Division, and 277.Volks-Grenadier-Division launched their attack against the twin villages of Krinkelt and Rocherath, held by elements of the 2nd and 99th Infantry Divisions. For the assault, they were supported by the Panthers from I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12, part of Kampfgruppe Kühlmann. They had expected to capture the villages on the first day but ran into stiff resistance, and by the evening of 18 December, the villages were still in American hands. What remained of I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 was then pulled back and redeployed to support the attack on Büllingen and Dom Bütgenbach by 12.Volks-Grenadier-

Division and the rest of Kampfgruppe Kühlmann. For three days the combined group tried to push through the American lines between the two towns but after one last failed attempt on 22 December, supported by the Brümmbars of Sturmpanzer-Abteilung 217, they were beaten back by American artillery and tank destroyers.

To the south, Kampfgruppe Peiper from II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, reinforced by the Tigers from s.SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, was held up for nearly seven hours as the engineers from 12.Volks-Grenadier-Division struggled to replace the blown railway bridge at Losheim. Frustrated at the delay, Peiper forced an improvised crossing down the steep embankment and along the tracks. That evening, 3.Fallschirmjäger-Division captured Lanzerath and Peiper wasted no time sending his men off across country in that direction, losing three tanks and five half-tracks to mines. Arriving there around midnight, he found the Fallschirmjäger commander had called a halt for the night. After a heated exchange, Peiper radioed for permission to have I./FJR 9 subordinated to him and headed off towards Buchholtz, now also in FJR 9 hands.

With his tanks beginning to run low on fuel, Peiper decided to head north into 12.SS-Panzer-Division's assigned route, to capture the fuel dump known to exist at Büllingen. After refuelling and anxious to move on, he missed an opportunity of outflanking the American units holding up 12.SS-Panzer-Division, and headed southwest towards Stavelot. That afternoon, they passed through Baugnez crossroads where they ran into a column of vehicles from the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion heading from Malmédy to St. Vith. It was here the infamous massacre of about 80 unarmed American prisoners occurred.

The Kampfgruppe ran into its first serious resistance at Ligneuville from a small force from the 9th Armored Division, where a Sherman knocked out the lead Panther as it attempted to cross the bridge over the Amblève River. After dispatching two Shermans and an M10 tank destroyer, the Kampfgruppe carried on to Stavelot during the night. Losing another Panther outside of Stavelot, they decided to wait until daylight when it could be determined what forces they were up against. In the meantime, the American defenses in Stavelot had been strengthened.

After a short artillery barrage, the Kampfgruppe raced through Stavelot as the Americans retreated before them and headed towards Trois Ponts. Here, the Americans had better luck and managed to blow the bridges over the Salm and Amblève Rivers, forcing Peiper to turn north towards La Gleize. A small group of reinforcements from Kampfgruppe Knittel joined them later that night but reported that Stavelot had fallen back into American hands. Peiper ordered Knittel back to recapture the town and decided to carry on with the advance through Stoumont.

The attack went in early in the early morning before daybreak and Stoumont was quickly captured. As they advanced beyond Stoumont, they ran into a roadblock set up with some Shermans and an M36 from the 740th Tank Battalion, losing three Panthers. Kampfgruppe Peiper would get no further than this.

Now surrounded, they fell back to La Gleize while I. and II.SS-Panzer-Korps made desperate efforts to save them. On Christmas Eve, Peiper was granted permission to break out of the trap and early on Christmas morning, he and about 800 men escaped back to the German lines. On 26 December, Kampfgruppe Peiper was disbanded and the remaining units returned to their original regiments. The remains of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 were assembled between Vielsalm and Born for refitting and transferred to V.Panzer-Armee for operations in that sector.

The task assigned to II.SS-Panzer-Korps was to follow I.SS-Panzer-Korps and exploit their expected breakthrough and drive to Antwerp. Commanded by SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich, II.SS-Panzer-Korps was comprised of 2.SS-Panzer-Division 'Das Reich' and 9.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hohenstaufen'.

When it became apparent that I.SS-Panzer-Korps was having difficulty achieving their objectives, 2.SS-Panzer-Division was redirected south around St. Vith forcing the Americans to withdraw. On 22 December, they defeated a small American force at Baraque de Fraiture and headed north to Manhay where they ran into the 7th Armored Division. Manhay was captured after a short night battle and SS-Panzer-Regiment 2 moved on towards Grandmenil and Erezée but were stopped by a 7th Armored counterattack and were unable to advance any further.

Similarly, 9.SS-Panzer-Division was committed to support Kampfgruppe Hansen and on 21 December, attacking from Recht, ran into 7th Armored Division, who were well entrenched around Poteau. For four days, the Shermans and tank destroyers kept SS-Panzer-Regiment 9 at bay. Then, on Christmas Eve, as the Americans were withdrawing to shorten their defensive lines, SS-Panzer-Regiment 9 launched a final assault that was broken up by fighters, strafing and bombing their assembly area. The 7th Armored Division made good their escape and 18.Volks-Grenadier-Division finally captured the town.

V.Panzer-Armee

V.Panzer-Armee area of operations extended from Manderfeld in the north to Holzthum in the south. General der Panzertruppen Hasso von Manteuffle had at his disposal XLVII.Panzer-Korps with 2.Panzer-Division, Panzer-Lehr-Division and 26.Volks-Grenadier-Division and later, 15.Panzer-Grenadier-Division and 9.Panzer-Division, making it the most powerful of the three in V.Panzer-Armee. LVIII.Panzer-Korps with 116.Panzer-Division and 560.Volks-Grenadier-Division and LXVI.Korps with 18. and 62.Volks-Grenadier-Division and Führer-Begleit-Brigade made up the balance of his force. On 26.December, XXXIX.Panzer-Korps was formed with 167.Volks-Grenadier-Division and the newly transferred 1.SS-Panzer-Division and subordinated to V.Panzer-Armee as well.

XLVII.Panzer-Korps, under General der Panzertruppen Heinrich von Lüttwitz, was assembled on the left flank of V.Panzer-Armee, with 2.Panzer-Division and Panzer-Lehr assigned the same route that would take them through Bastogne and on to the Meuse at Dinant, Anseremme and Givet. Before the two

Panzer-Divisions could begin their advance, a bridge had to be constructed across the Our River at Dasburg, meanwhile the Panzer-Grenadiers, having crossed in rubber boats, advanced towards Clervaux to capture the bridge over the Clerf River. That evening, 2.Panzer-Division crossed the Our and headed for Clervaux, breaking up a counterattack by light tanks from the 707th Tank Battalion heading south from Heinerscheid. On 17 December, they followed their route that took them around the north side of Bastogne to Ortheuville, where an intact Bailey bridge was found. The advance continued after being held up for a day due to lack of fuel and by the evening of 23 December, Kampfgruppe von Böhm, formed around Pz.Aufkl.Abt.2, halted for the night at Foy-Notre-Dame, only four miles from the Meuse. Panzer-Lehr, having advanced around Bastogne through Sibret, continued west through St. Hubert and captured Rochefort on 24 December, supported by the Jagdpanthers of s.Pz.Jg.Abt.559. In order to reinforce von Böhm, another battlegroup under Major Ernst von Cochenhausen was quickly formed and by that evening had occupied positions around Celles. The Allies had not been sleeping through all this though, and British forces had begun to be moved up to reinforce the American positions. The British 3rd Royal Tank Regiment was now in a blocking position at Dinant while the American 2nd Armored Division had succeeded in cutting off the two Kampfgruppen from the rest of the division. A relief force, Kampfgruppe Holtmeyer, advancing through Rochefort, was unsuccessful in linking up with the surrounded spearheads. Now low on fuel and ammunition, they were overwhelmed and eliminated on 26 December, having come the closest to achieving their goal.

General der Panzertruppen Walter Krüger's LVIII.Panzer-Korps was deployed in the center of V.Panzer-Armee. Almost immediately, 116.Panzer-Division ran into difficulty when it was found that the bridge at Ouren would not hold the weight of its armored vehicles and it was redirected south, where it crossed the Our River at Kalborn. Incorrectly believing the bridge at Ortheuville had been destroyed, they were again redirected through Houffalize towards Samrée, losing more precious time. Samrée fell to Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 60 and Volks-Grenadier-Regiment 1129, opening the way for Panzer-Regiment 16 to Hotton on 20 December. Though lightly defended, the grenadiers of Pz.Gren.Rgt. 60 were unable to capture the town and Pz.Rgt.16 was directed south to Marche. By now, the Americans had strengthened their positions around Marche with elements of the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions and the 84th Infantry Division. After several unsuccessful attempts to take the town, the remaining troops of 116.Panzer-Division were withdrawn on the evening of 26 December.

LXVI.Armee-Korps under General der Infanterie Walter Lucht, with 18. and 62.Volks-Grenadier-Division, was flanked by 116.Panzer-Division on the south and 1.SS-Panzer-Division on the north. Weak in armor, they were bolstered somewhat by the allocation of Führer-Begleit-Brigade on 17 December. In one of the more successful initial assaults, they surrounded the inexperienced 106th Infantry Division occupying the Schnee Eifel resulting in the largest mass surrender of U.S troops of the entire war on 19 December. 18.Volks-Grenadier-Division captured St. Vith on 21 December, the same day LXVI.Armee-Korps was transferred to VI.Panzer-Armee.

In late December, 1.SS-Panzer-Division was transferred south to V.Panzer-Armee and, along with 167.Volks-Grenadier-Division, became part of the newly activated XXXIX.Panzer-Korps under Generalleutnant Karl Decker. They were part of the final assault to try and capture Bastogne as ordered by Hitler on 27 December. Patton's Third Army had already broken through to the beleaguered city and the German effort proved to be too little too late.

VII.Armee

General der Panzertruppen Erich Brandenberger's VII.Armee was tasked with protecting the south flank of the offensive and was the weakest of the three armies. For this, his forces consisted of LXXXV.Armee-Korps with 5.Fallschirmjäger-Division and 79. and 352.Volks-Grenadier-Divisions; LXXX.Armee-Korps with 212., 276. and 340.Volks-Grenadier-Divisions and LIII.Armee-Korps with 9.Volks-Grenadier-Division and the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade.

5.Fallschirmjäger-Division advanced as far as Sibret, cutting off Bastogne from the south on 21 December. Patton's Third Army began its counter-attack the next day. 5.Fallschirmjäger-Division was transferred to the command of LIII.Armee-Korps, which, along with Führer-Grenadier-Brigade, was rushed in to face Patton's forces. Unfortunately, it became tied up in traffic and did not arrive with sufficient force to resist the advance. On 26 December, 4th Armored Division pushed its way through Assenois and linked up with the defenders at Bastogne. The blockade was broken.

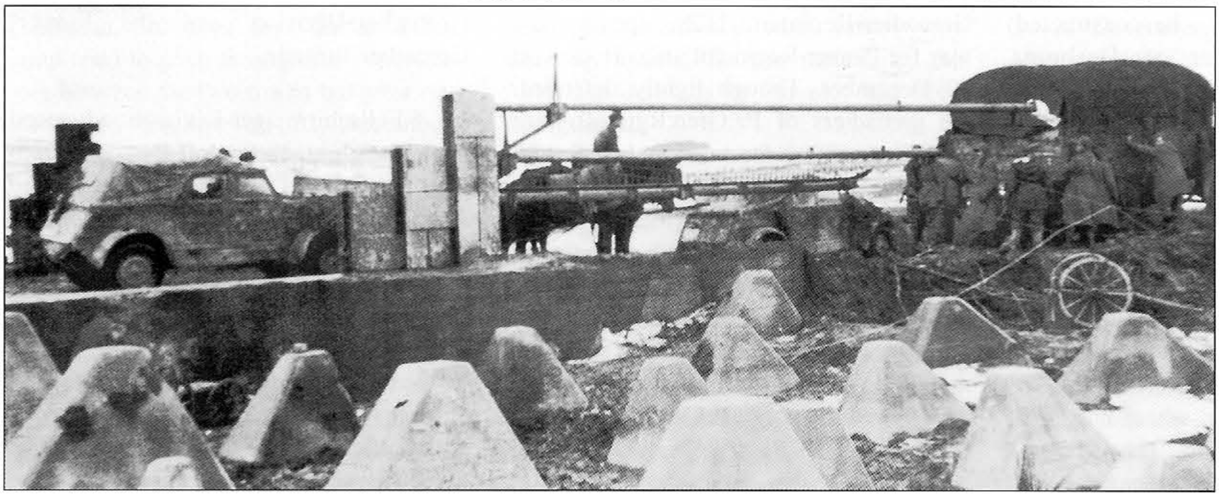
Operation 'Nordwind'

On New Year's Day, I.Armee launched a diversionary attack in the Alsace region to attempt to divert American forces away from the Ardennes. Hitler felt that recapturing the area, especially the city of Strasbourg, would also provide a boost to the morale of the German people. At the same time, XIX.Armee would attack north towards Strasbourg in an attempt to break out from the Colmar Pocket, link up with I.Armee, thereby trapping a substantial part of the U.S. VI and French II Corps. When the French found out that the Americans were planning to withdraw from area leaving Strasbourg open to the Germans, they reacted by threatening to move into the area themselves in defiance of the Allied Command. It was unnecessary in any event, as Allied resistance prevented the German forces from linking up and by the end of January, Operation 'Nordwind' was over.

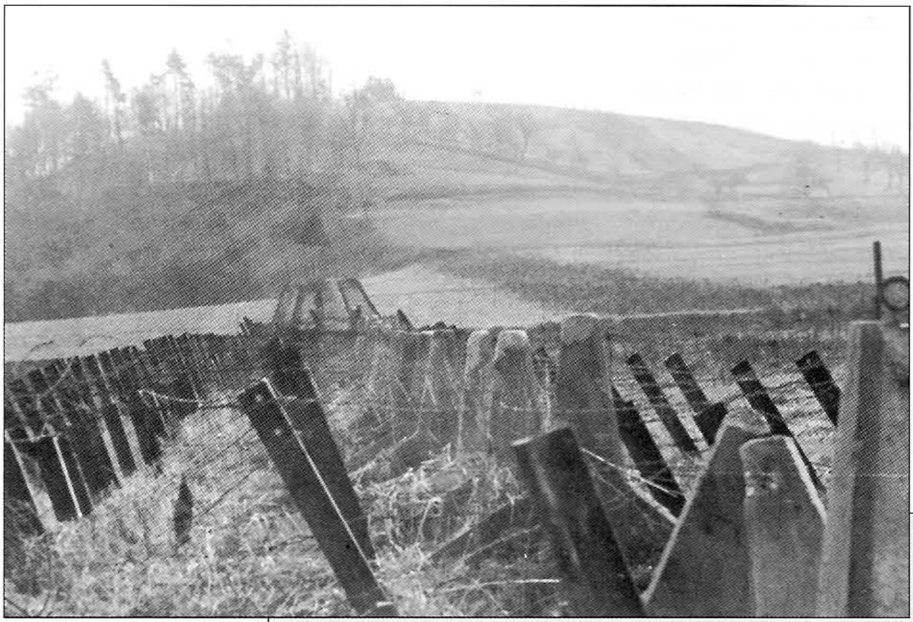
Epilog

'Wacht am Rhein' had resulted in approximately 81,000 Germans and 77,000 Americans killed and wounded in addition to loss of approximately 500-600 armored fighting vehicles on each side and the tremendous destruction of property and loss of civilian life. Hitler had in fact postponed the Western Allies advance into Germany by no more than five weeks. His last gamble in the west had failed and by the end of January 1945 the Germans were back to their original lines where they had launched the attack from six weeks earlier.

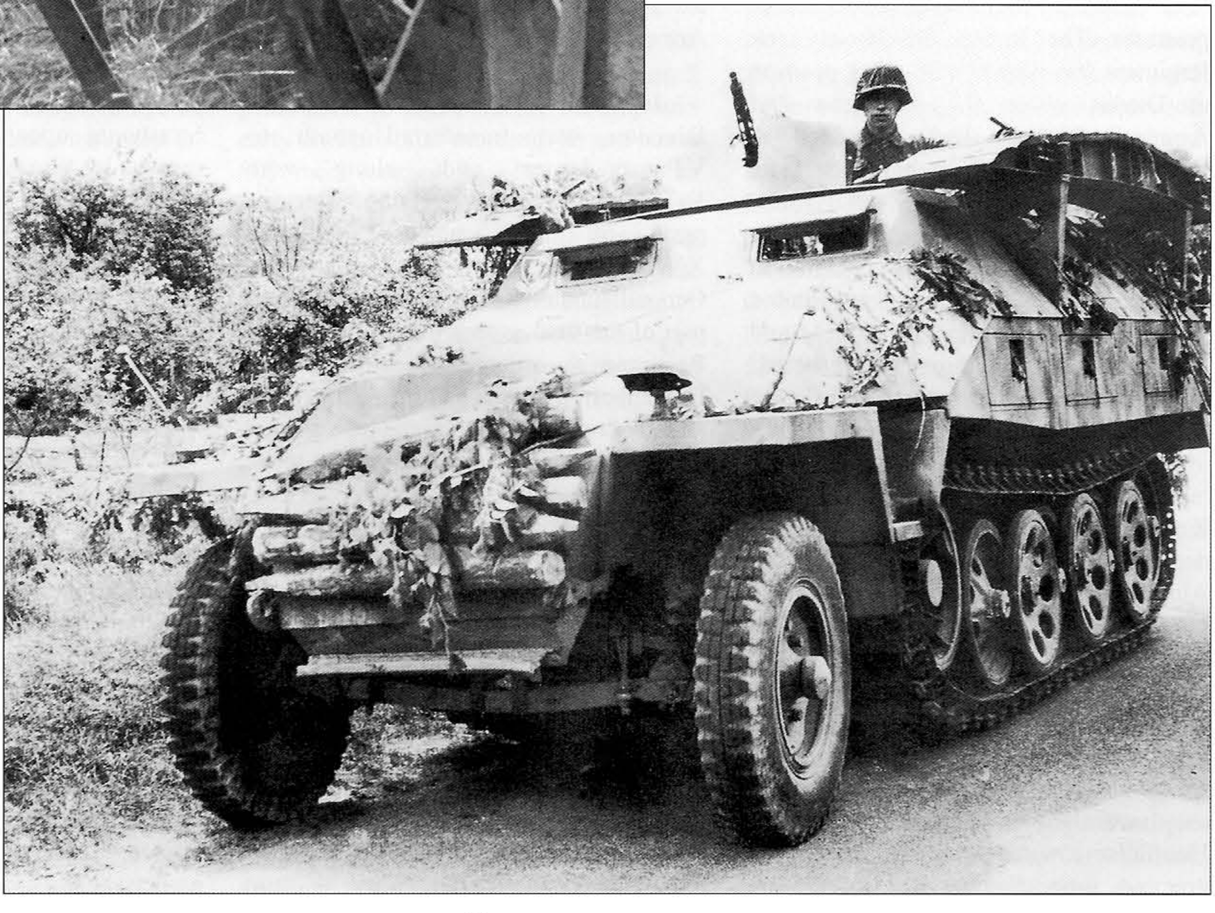
6.Panzer-Armee Sector



Kübelwagens from 1.SS-Panzer-Division wait behind a bogged down transport truck while passing through the concrete tank obstacles called 'Dragon's Teeth' that formed part of the Siegfried Line in western Germany at the start of the offensive. The poor condition of the roads hampered the German advance all through the Ardennes.

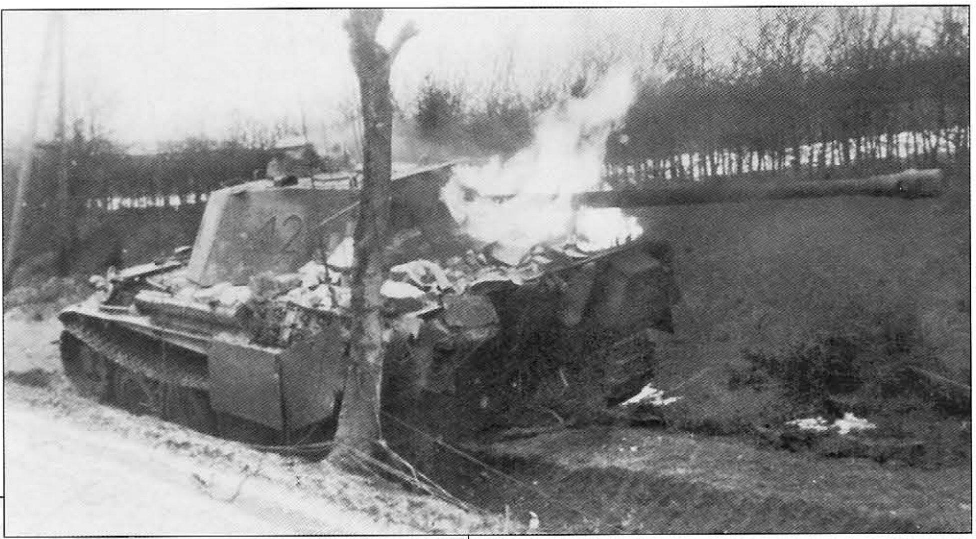


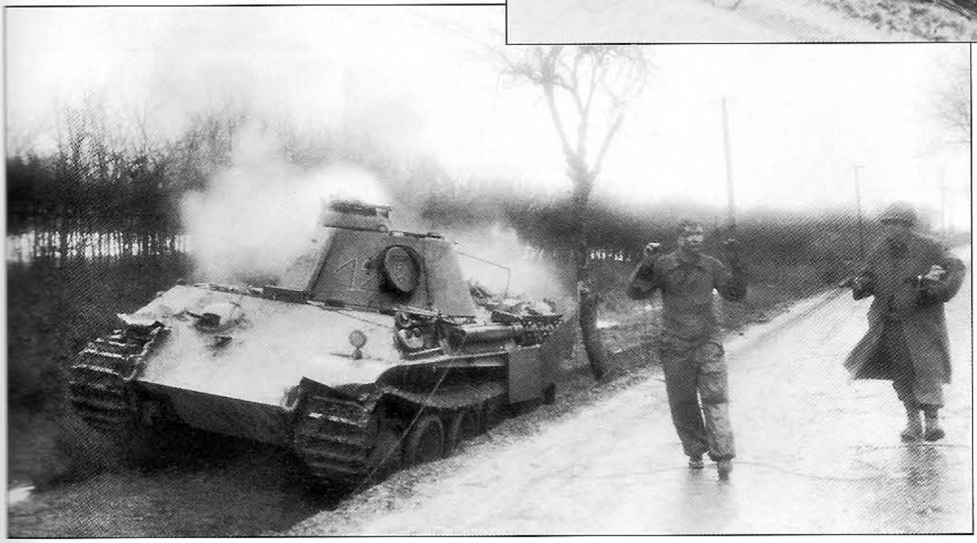
Another view of the Siegfried Line as it snakes its way across the German countryside. This section has been hastily constructed from precast concrete 'Dragon's Teeth' and pieces of railroad track buried in the ground topped by barbed wire. Fortifications such as this did little to hold up the Allied advance.



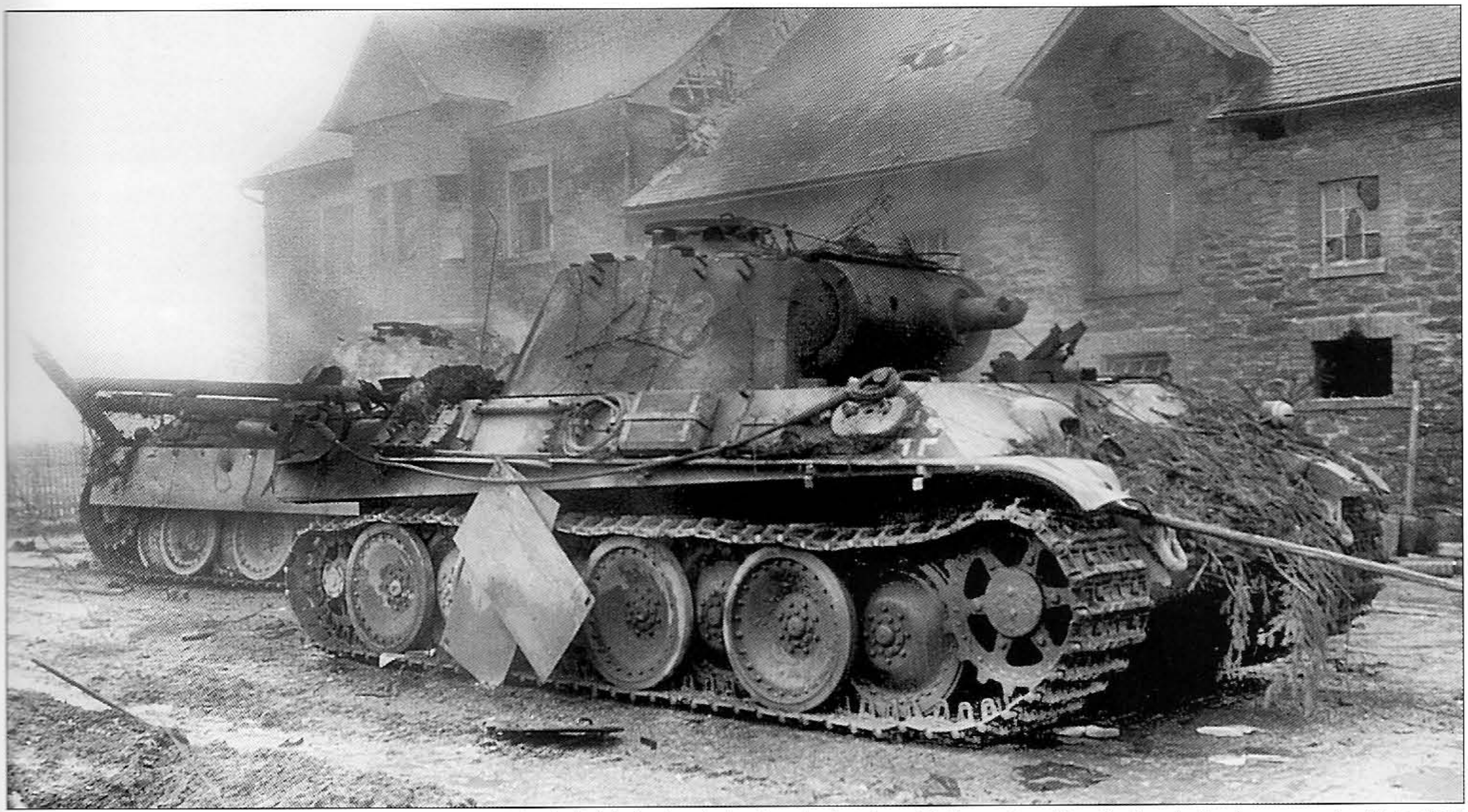
An Sd.Kfz.251/7 Ausf.D from 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' pictured in the fall of 1944. The vehicle is painted in overall dark sand with a camouflage scheme of green and brown patches and has the division's emblem, a single runic 'S' with a skeleton key within a shield over two oak leaves, painted in white beside the right vision flap. Although the SS-Divisions were better equipped than most, the division was only up to 75% of its allotted strength at the start of the offensive.

A Pz.Kpfw.V Panther Ausf.G from 12.SS-Panzer-Division burns along the road south of Krinkelt on the second day of the assault. Rubble from a collapsed building covers the engine deck indicating they have already seen some action in the town. It is painted with a base coat of red primer with green and dark sand patches. The tactical number '126' is painted on the sides and back of the turret with what are most likely, red numbers outlined in white.

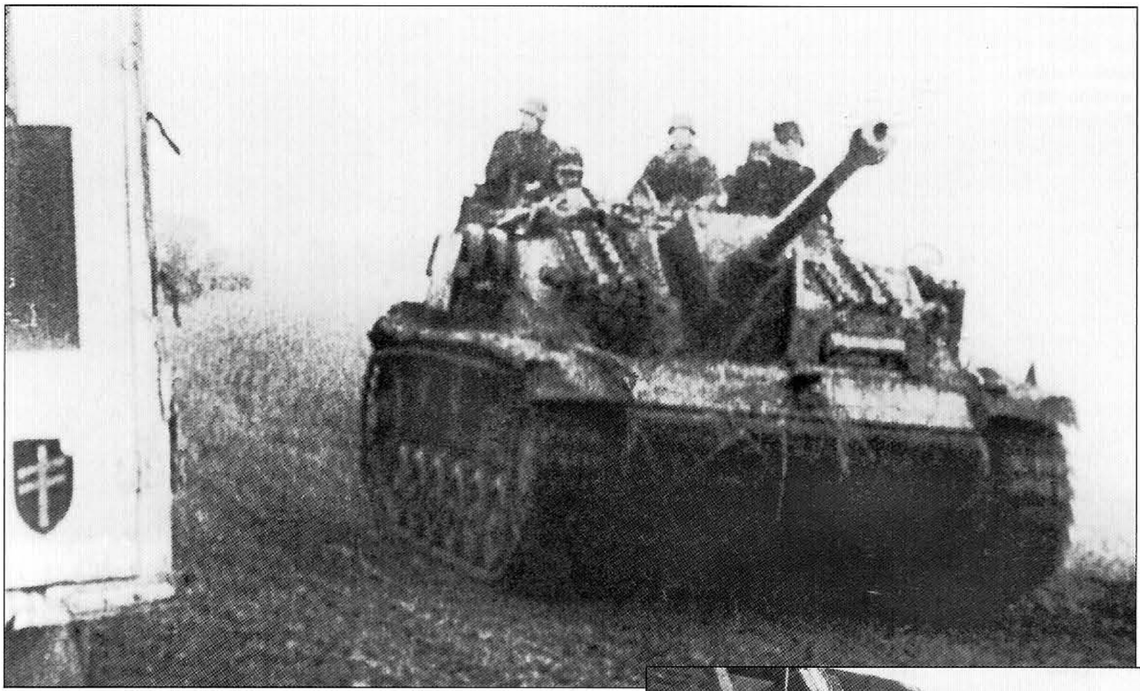




Another photo of Panther '126' from 12.SS-Panzer-Division near Krinkelt, clearly showing the tactical number on the rear of the turret. The G.I. on the right is reportedly from the photo unit that took the pictures and the photo has possibly been staged.

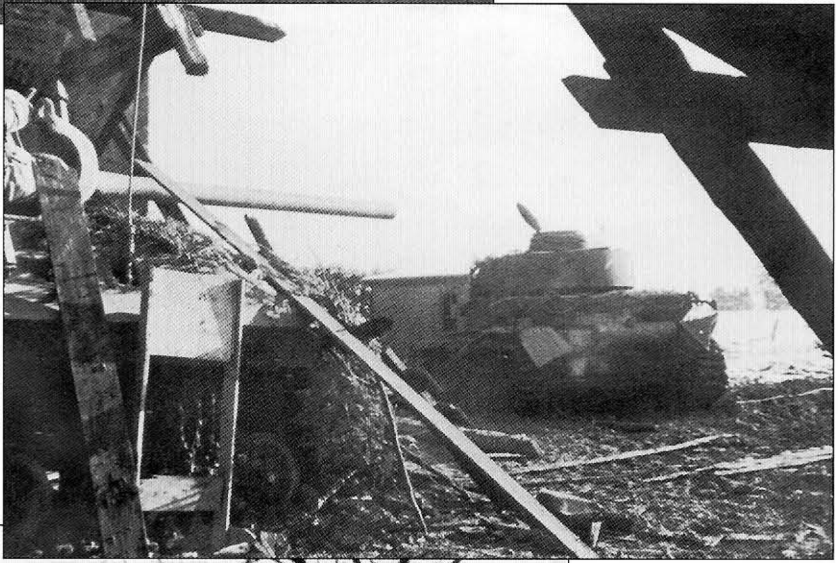


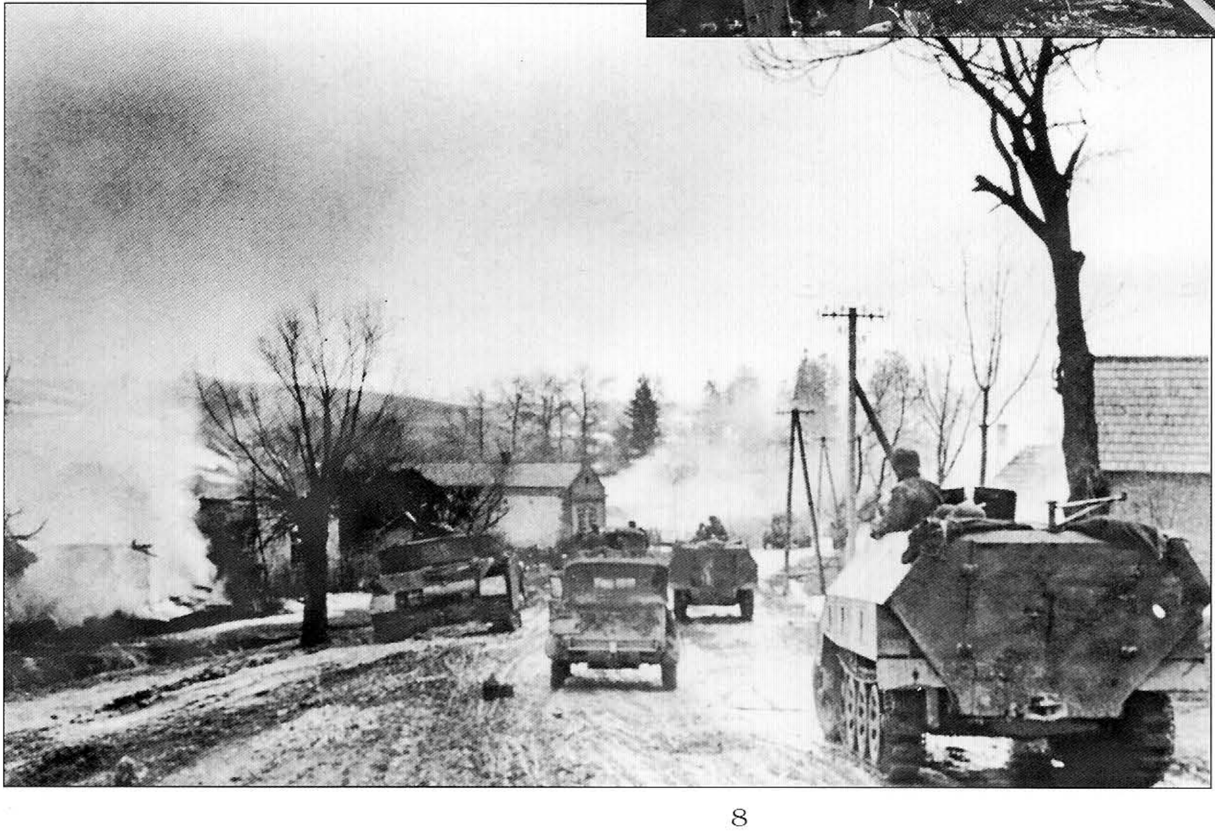
Two Panthers of I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 smolder in Krinkelt after being knocked out on 18 December. The Panther in the foreground, with tactical number '318', has had its gun barrel blown off in the vicious fighting that took place there against the U.S. 99th Infantry Division, reinforced by the 2nd Infantry Division. Attacking in an early morning fog, the Panthers were easy prey for bazooka teams who were able to close in without being spotted. Later, SS-Unterscharführer Willi Fischer, a Panther commander in 3.Kompanie recalled, 'It was an absolute deathtrap for Panzers'.



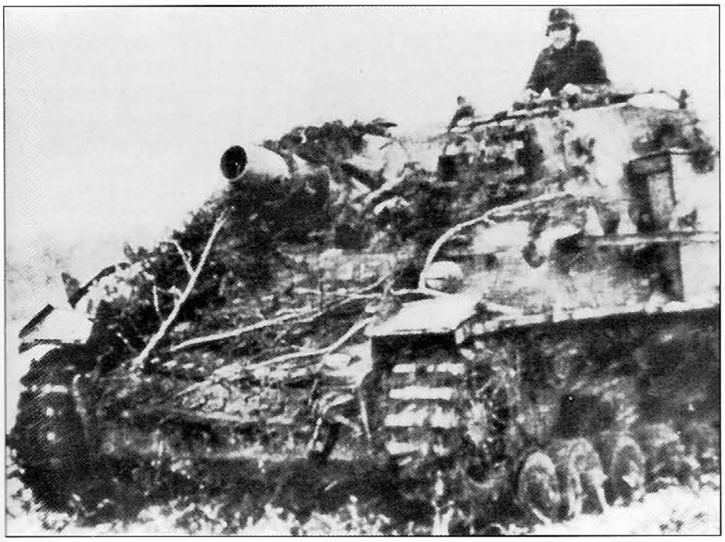
A Sturmgeschütz III Ausf.G of 3.Panzer-Grenadier-Division rolls through the morning mist. Originally in OKW reserve, they were thrown into the battle on 19 December to support LXVII.Korps in their attack on Elsenborn Ridge in the northern sector. After the failure of the assault, 3.Panzer-Grenadier-Division was transferred to the V.Panzer-Armee sector. The divisional insignia can be seen on the rear of the truck to the left.

A Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J from II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 knocked out at Dom Butgenbach, possiby by this M36 of the 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion concealed in the wreckage of a farm building, on 21 December. After the failure of a further assault the next day, 12.SS-Panzer-Division was withdrawn to reassemble in the area of Möderscheid and Born on 23 December.



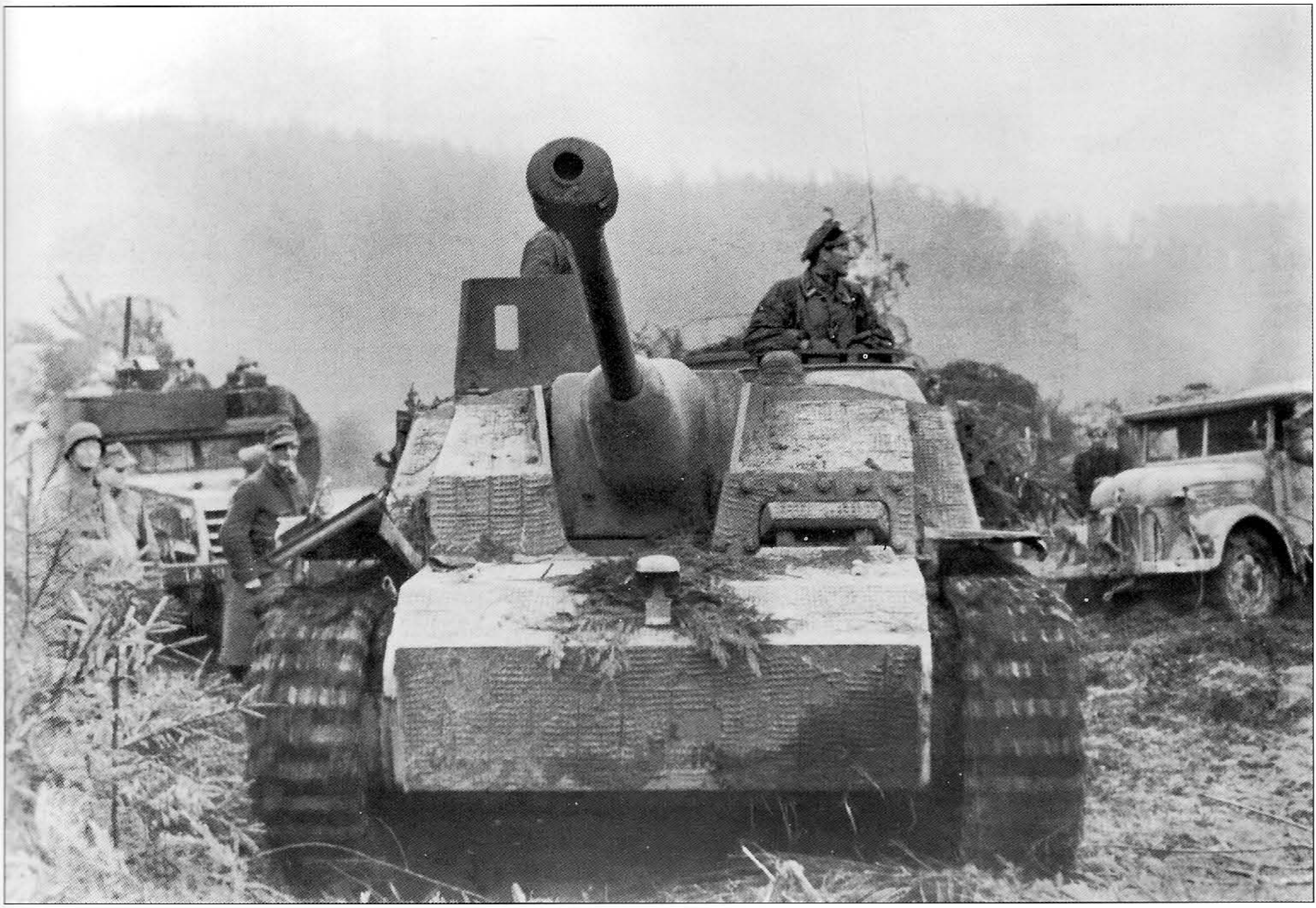


A column of SS-Panzer-Grenadiers pass through a burning Belgian village in their Sd.Kfz.251 Ausf.D half-tracks. On the original photograph, the SS registration plate is faintly visible on the nearest vehicle. The lead half-track is fitted with a star antenna on the left side indicating it is a command vehicle. To the left, a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H can be seen at the side of the road.

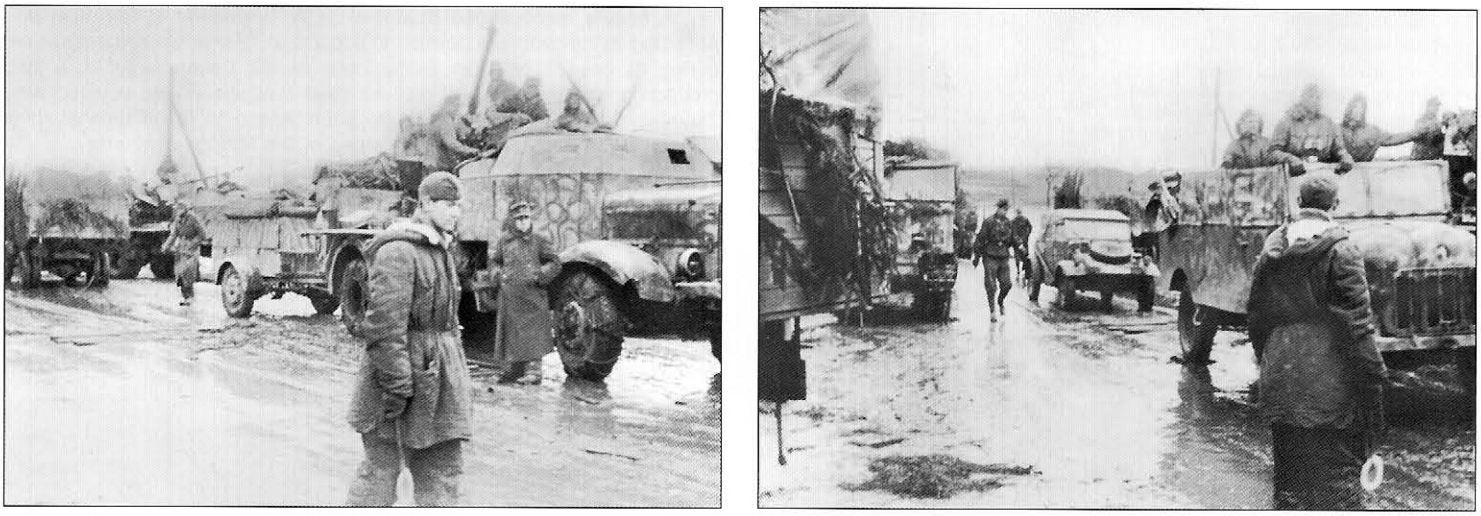


A heavily camouflaged Sturmpanzer IV Brummbär of Sturmpanzer-Abteilung 217 moves into position in support of 12.Volk-Grenadier-Division during its assault on Dom Butgenbach on 22 December. It is a late production vehicle fitted with resilient steel roadwheels and covered with Zimmerit. Markings appear to have been limited to the standard white outlined black Balkenkreuz on the sides of the fighting compartment and front of the driver's plate.

Another photo of a Brummbär from Sturmpanzer-Abteilung 217 preparing to fire on the American positions around Dom Butgenbach on 22 December.

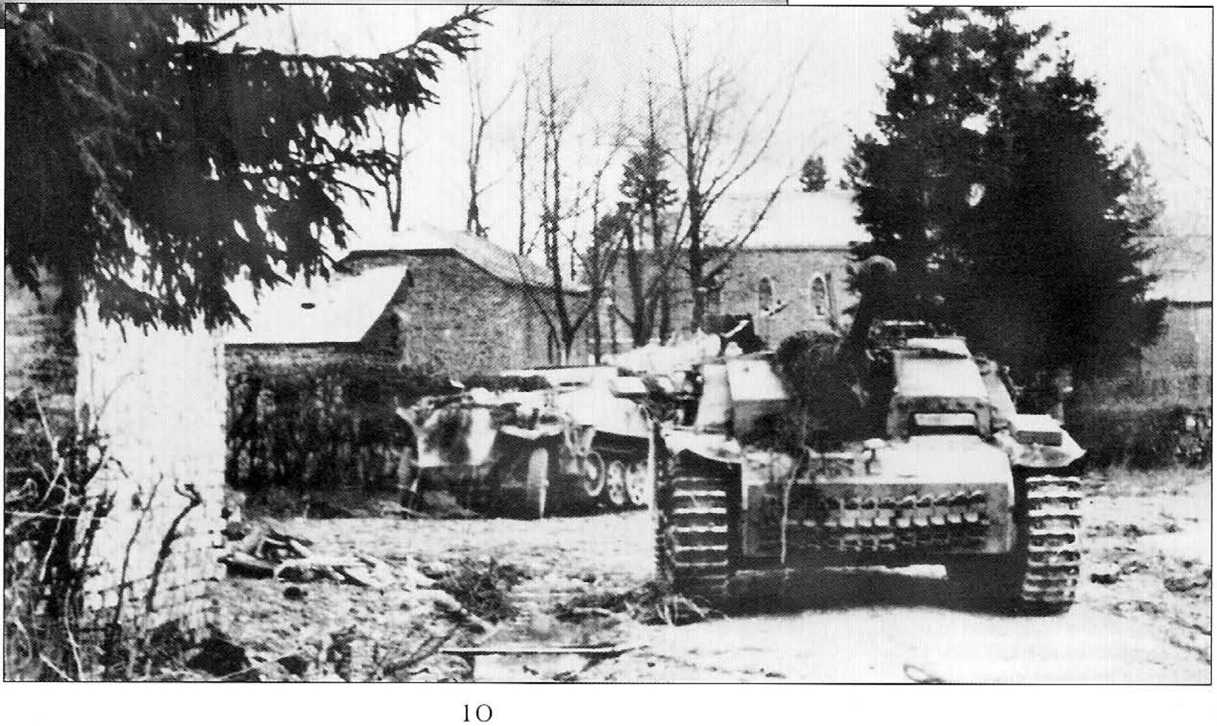


This Sturmgeschütz III Ausf.G of an unidentified SS unit was one of those built by Alkett and features their unique waffle pattern Zimmerit coating. It has been fitted with the 'Topfblende' mantlet, often referred to as a 'Saukopf', and a single 80mm armor plate on the right side of the upper hull identifiable by the absence of the bolts used to attach the additional 30mm armor plates. It was assigned to either 2. or 9.SS-Panzer-Division which both were equipped with two companies of StuG.III/IV in their II.Abteilung. On the right can be seen a Steyr 1500A/01 personnel car and on the left a captured U.S. M2A1 or M3A1 half-track displaying the 1st Army bumper code.



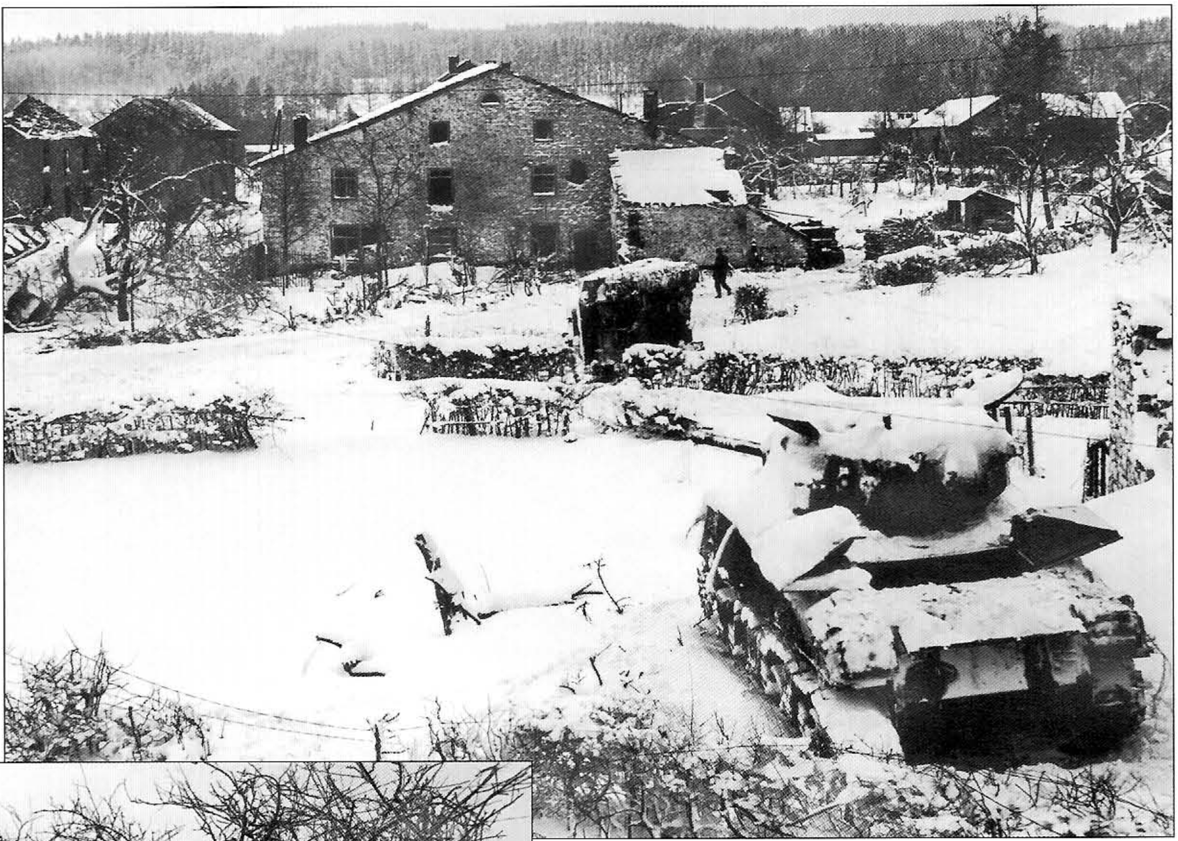
Two photographs of an unidentified SS unit advancing down a wet, muddy road in the first days of the attack. In the first photo there are two of the rarely photographed Mercedes-Benz L4500A trucks mounting 3.7cm FlaK43 anti-aircraft guns. Both are fitted with armored cabs and are towing special ammunition trailers. Note the different camouflage patterns on the first truck and its trailer. In the other photo, an open topped Steyr L1500A/01 personnel car, followed by a Kübelwagen, is passing an RSO/03 that has, what appears to be, the divisional emblem of 9.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hohenstaufen' painted on the left side of the cab. A number of the soldiers can be seen wearing the fur lined winter anorak introduced in February 1943.

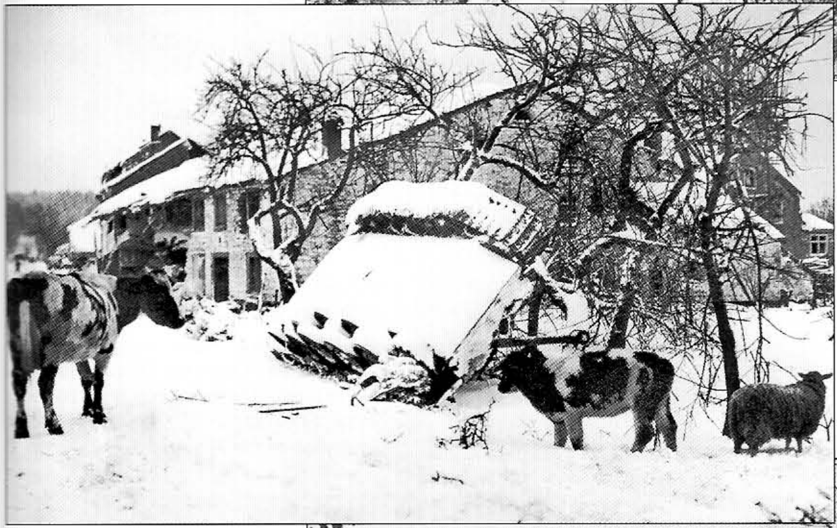
Another photo of what appears to be the same column of vehicles. The heavy camouflage of cut foliage makes it difficult to make any specific vehicle identification possible other than the Kübelwagen in the middle of the photo.



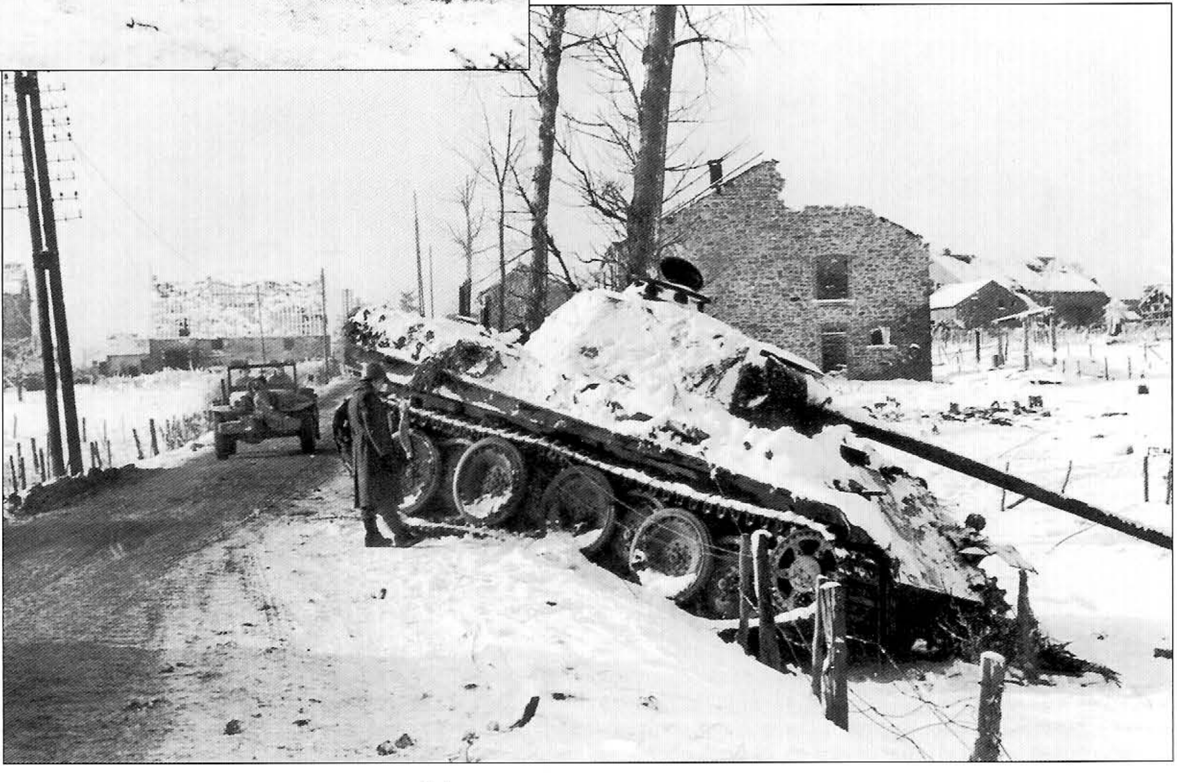
A StuG.III Ausf.G and an Sd.Kfz.251/1 Ausf.D sit abandoned near Manhay. This is a late production StuG.III without Zimmerit and equipped with the remote control machine gun mount on the fighting compartment roof, 80mm front plate on the right side of the superstructure, barrel travel support and deflector in front of the commander's cupola.

A knocked out Sherman tank from the 40th Tank Battalion of the 7th Armored Division lies in the snow with the ruins of the village of Manhay spread out before it. Another Sherman can be seen directly in front and an overturned Panther of 2.SS-Panzer-Division can be seen on the left. After capturing the crossroads at Baraque Fraiture on 23 December, 4.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2 commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Ortwin Pohl, bypassed Task Force Brewster defending the road to Manhay located seven kilometers to the north. On Christmas Eve 2.SS-Panzer-Division drove through the town where a bloody battle ensued, lasting throughout the night.



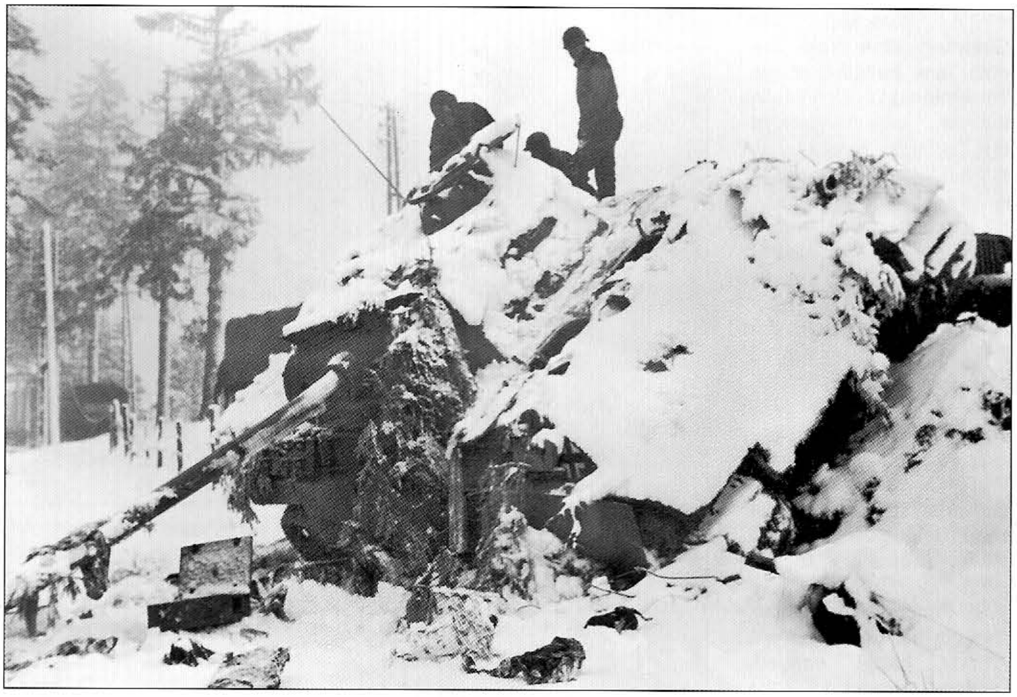


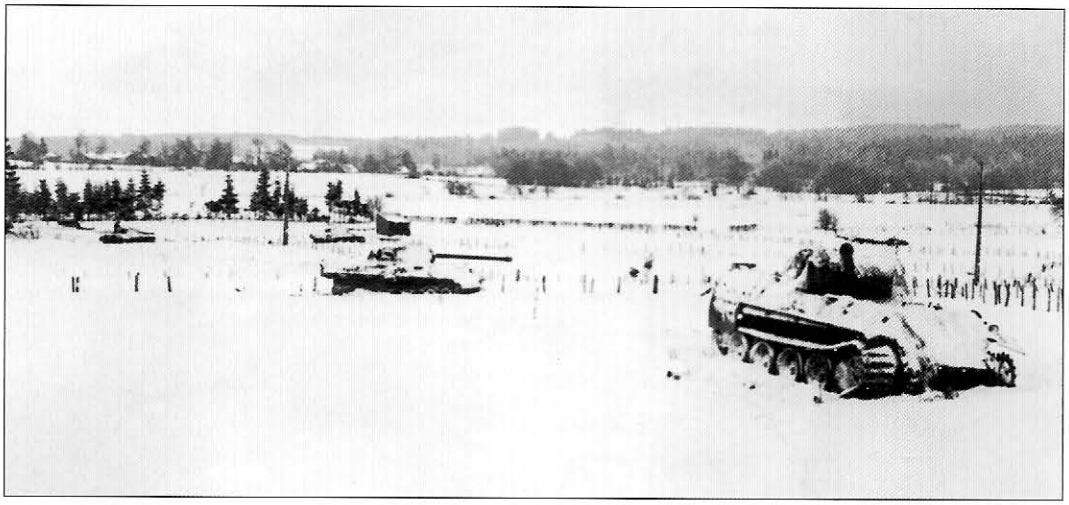
Another view of the Panther lying on its side from the photo above. After the battle, it was originally sitting beside the house immediately behind it and later moved out onto the road and turned over onto its side.



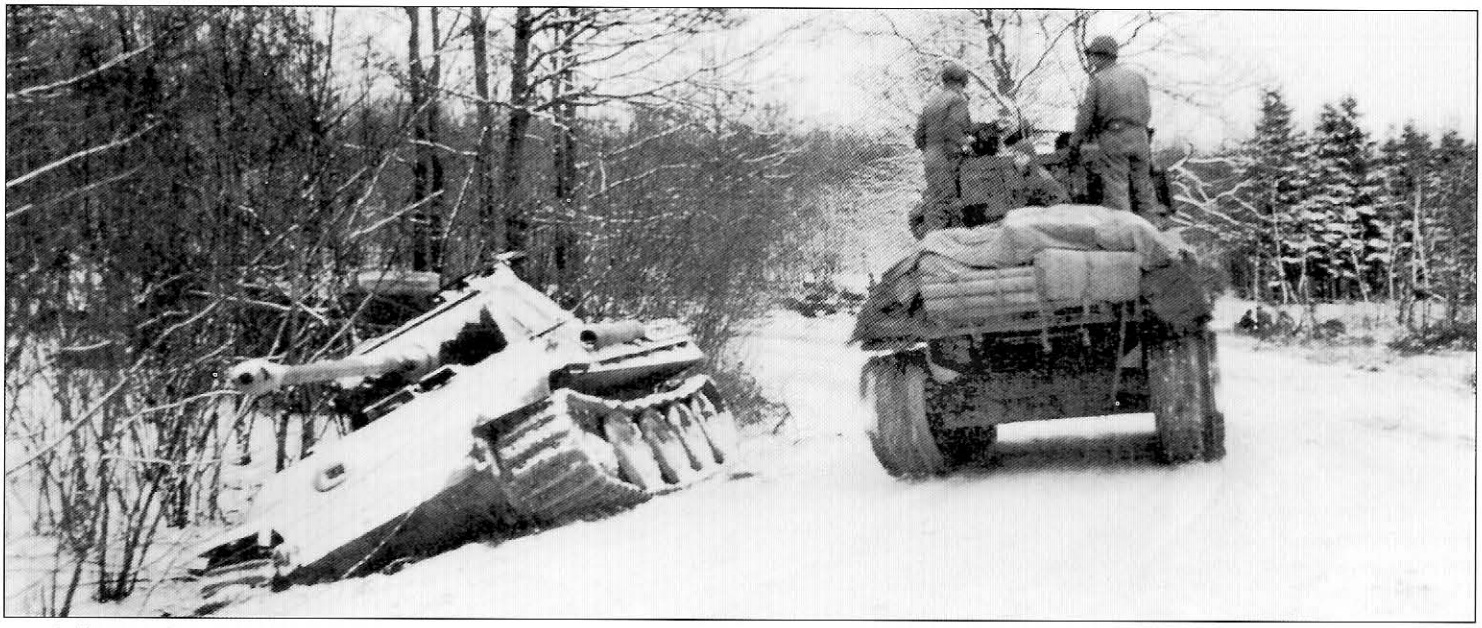
This Panther of 2.SS-Panzer-Division lies beside the road leading east from Manhay towards Trois Ponts. Originally abandoned on the road, it was pushed into the ditch by U.S. Army Engineers to clear the way.

After successfully taking Manhay on Christmas Day, 2.SS-Panzer-Division attacked west towards Grandmenil. Here, another Panther lies bulldozed unceremoniously off the road near the road junction north to Bomal between Manhay and Grandmenil.

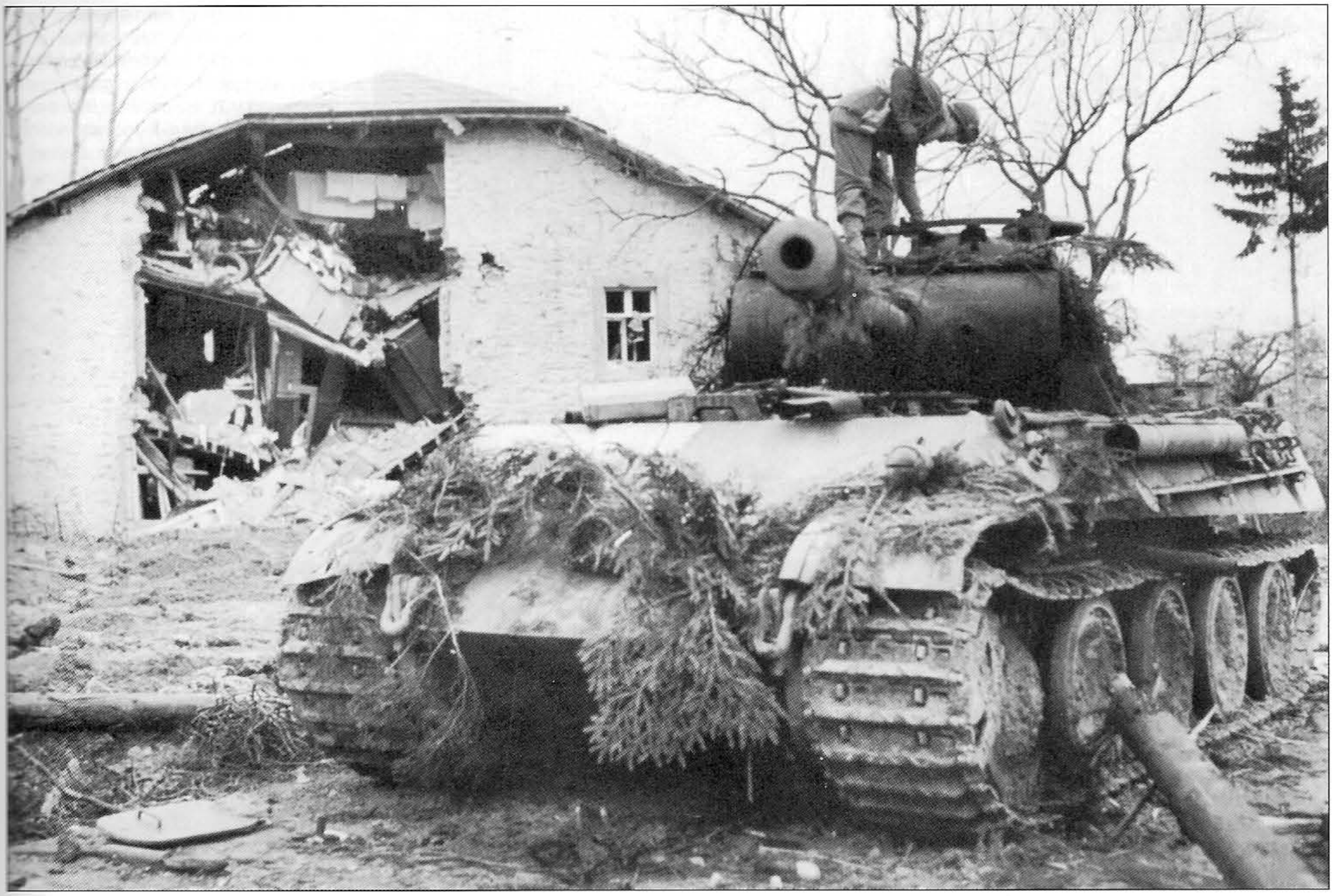




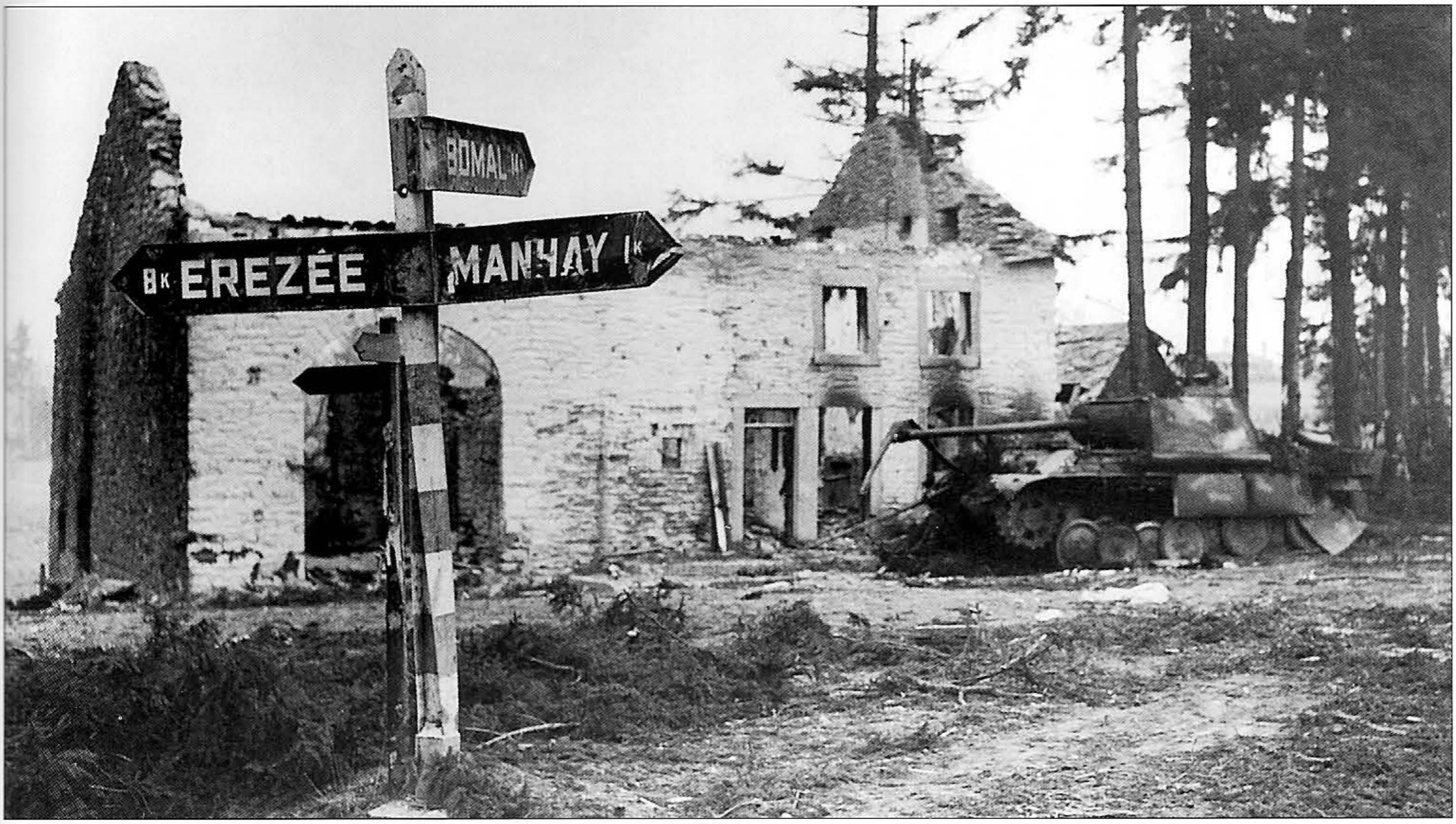
Four of the seven Panthers from 2.SS-Panzer-Division found abandoned around the Bomal-Manhay-Grandmenil road junction after running into Shermans of the 40th Tank Battalion of the 7th Armored Division.



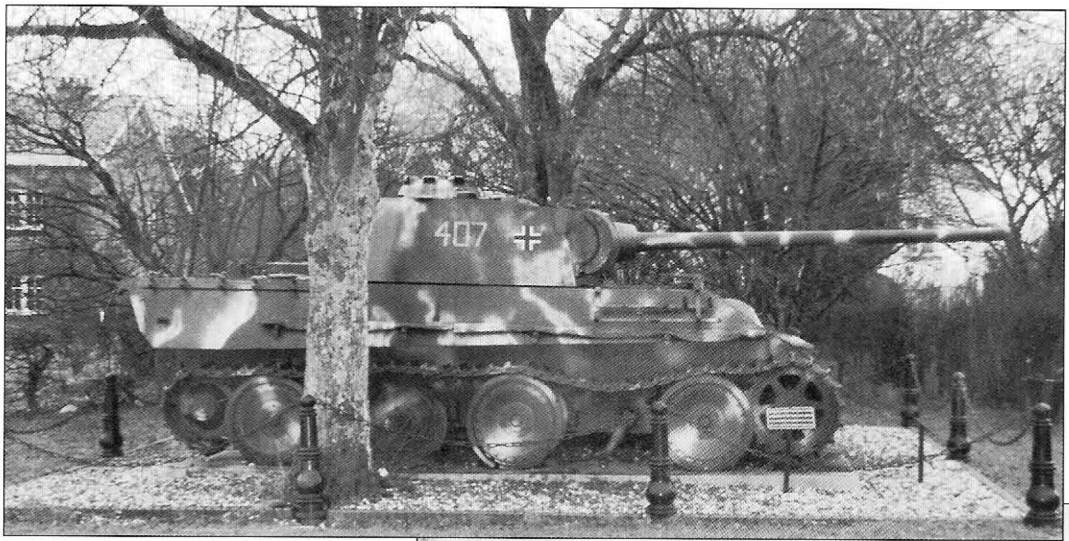
A Sherman from 2nd Armored Division passes an abandoned Panther from 2.SS-Panzer-Division on the road to Erezée just west of Grandmenil. As the German attack formed up, CCB of 3rd Armored Division was rushed south from La Gleize to defend the town. Their first assault was repulsed by elements of 3.SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 'Deutschland' commanded by SS-Obersturmbannführer Günter Wisliceny. Unable to advance any further, 2.SS-Panzer-Division pulled back from Grandmenil on 26 December.



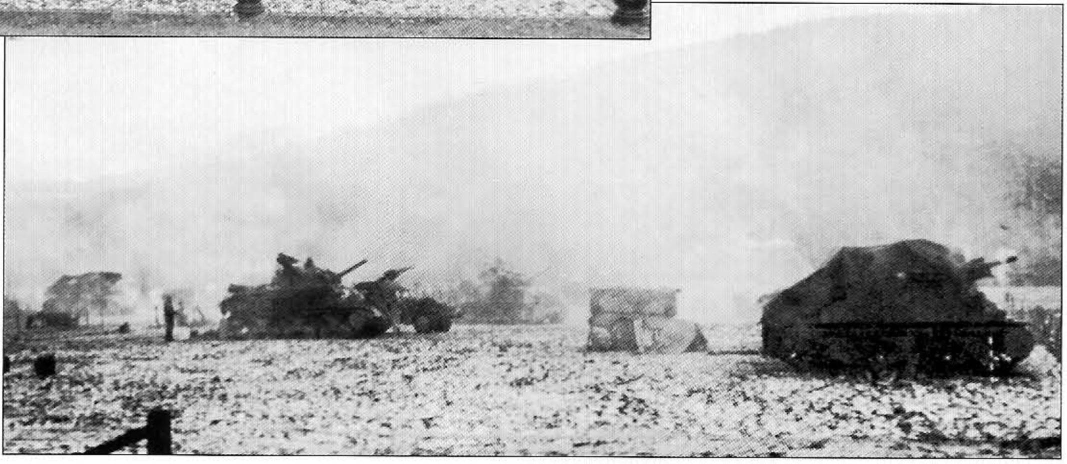
American soldiers from the 75th Infantry Division inspect a knocked out Panther Ausf.G from 2.SS-Panzer-Division in Grandmenil in late December 1944. It is a late production vehicle completed in October 1944 and is fitted with the raised fan cover for the crew compartment heater. In August 1944, jettisonable driver and radio operator hatches began to be installed and one can be seen laying on the ground to the left.



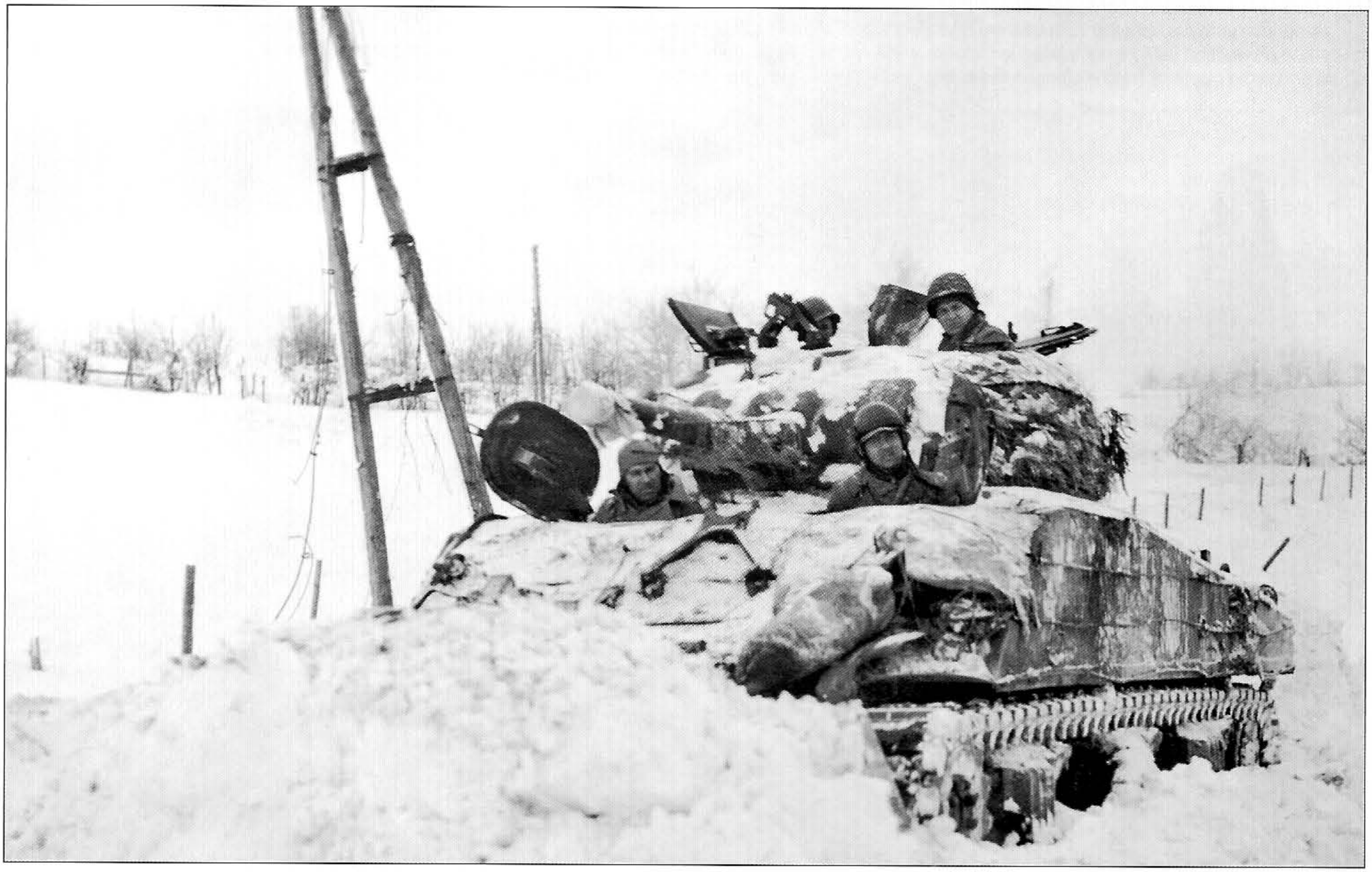
Another knocked out Panther Ausf.G from 2.SS-Panzer-Division along the road from Manhay to Grandmenil. Note how the signpost has been twisted around. Bomal actually lies along the road to the left in the direction the Panther was headed.



A reminder of the battle that once raged in the area, this Panther from 4.Kompanie of SS-Panzer-Regiment 2 sits alongside the road near Grandmenil. It is one of the seven Panthers that were found abandoned near the road junction to Bomal a couple of kilometers to the east.

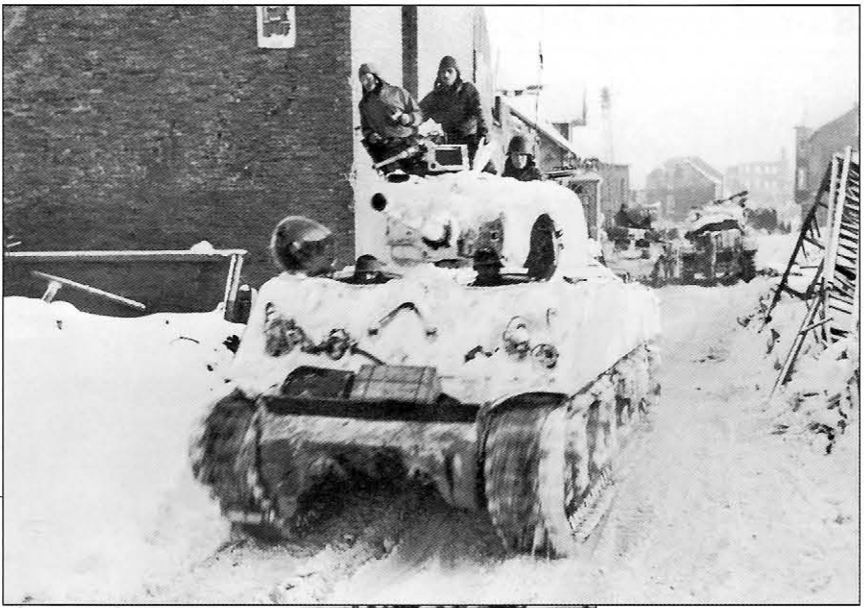


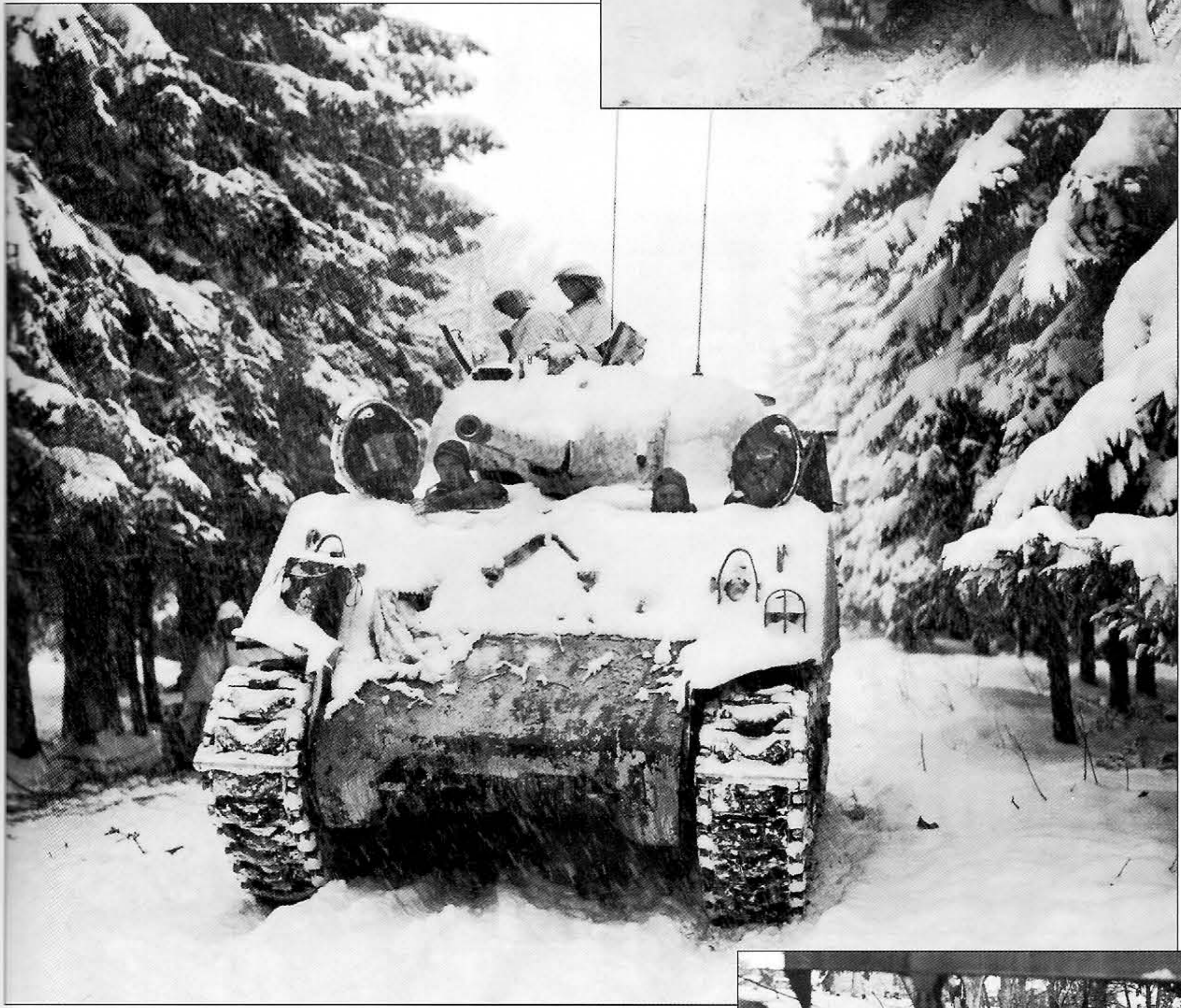
The American counterattack gathers momentum. M4 (105mm) howitzer tanks of the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Armored Regiment of the 3rd Armored Division accompanied by an M7B1 105mm Howitzer Motor Carriage, shell German positions in the Arbrefontaine area from a field near Trou-de-Bra in early January 1945.



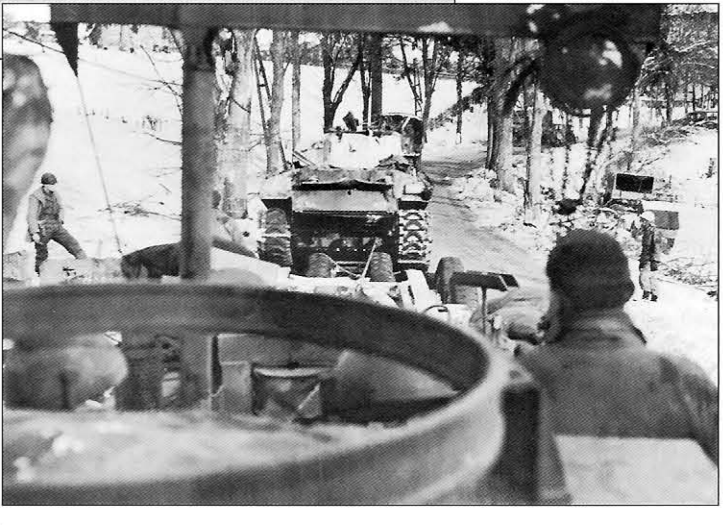
An M4A3 Sherman of the 745th Tank Battalion attached to the 1st Infantry Division 'The Big Red One' on a snow covered road near Müringen in January 1945. The crew has piled snow in front of the tank to help camouflage it in the snowy landscape.

Another M4A3 Sherman tank from the 7th Armored Division rumbles through St. Vith after the town was recaptured on 23 January 1945. On the afternoon of 16 December, the 7th Armored Division was ordered south to relieve the 106th Infantry Division at St. Vith. Their path took them in front of the advancing spearhead of Kampfgruppe Peiper, narrowly missing them and arriving in St. Vith on the afternoon of 17 December.

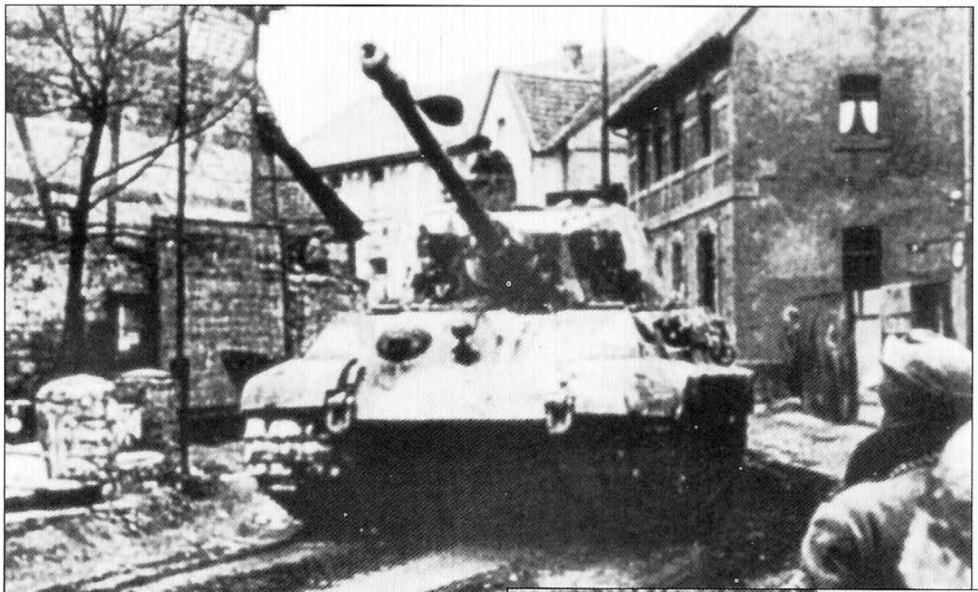




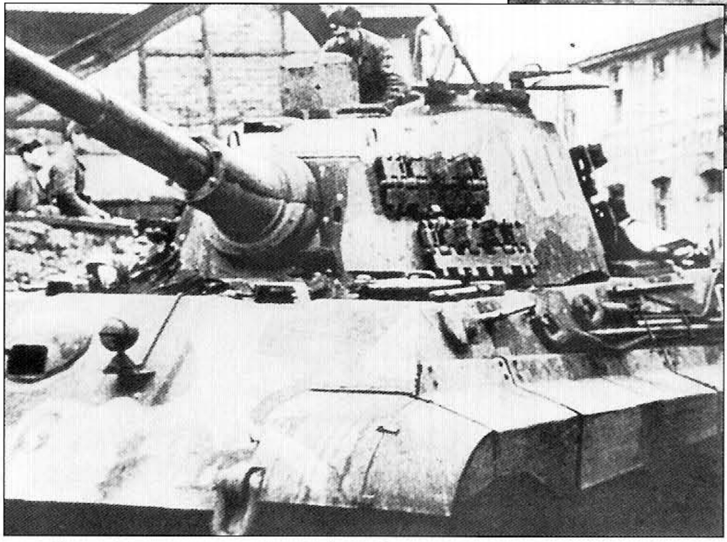
Troops of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division ride on Sherman tanks of the 740th Tank Battalion near Herresbach, a few kilometers east of St. Vith. By this time, the troops were beginning to receive proper winter clothing.



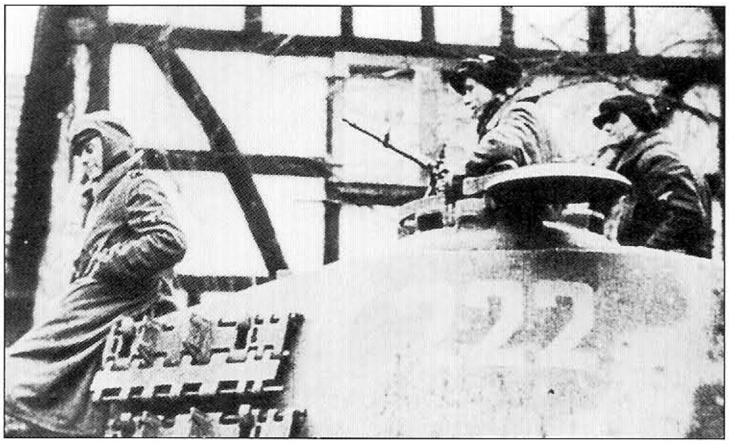
An M26 Dragon Wagon tank transporter winches a knocked out M4A3 Sherman onto its trailer in January 1945. The stenciled code on the rear plate indicates the Sherman was the 13th tank in Company 'B', 31st Tank Battalion of the 7th Armored Division.



A Tiger II from schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 moving through the village of Tondorf on the way to Kampfgruppe Peiper's assembly area the day before the attack on 15 December.

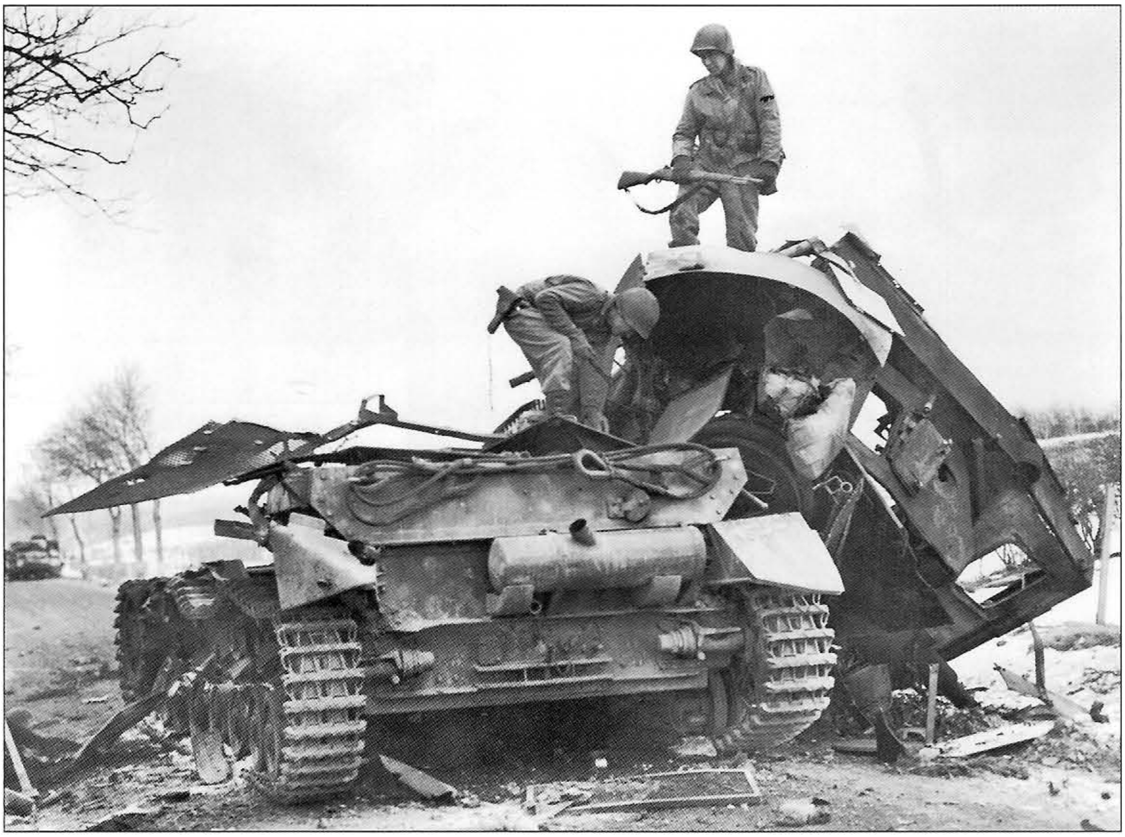


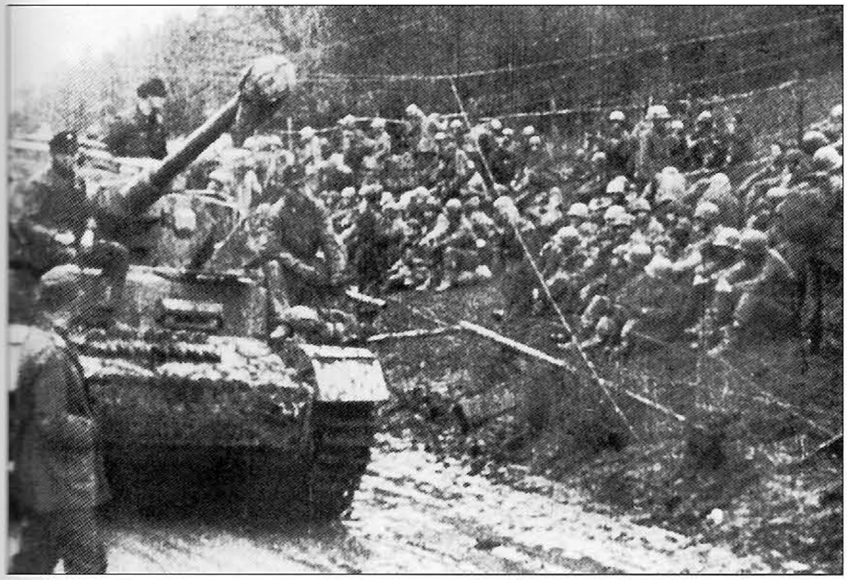
One of three command vehicles of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, this one with the tactical number '008', is seen moving through Tondorf as well on 15 December. It is painted in the 'Hinterhalt' camouflage scheme, commonly referred to as the 'ambush' scheme, consisting of a red oxide primer base coat with hard edged patches of dark yellow and dark green. Over this, a random pattern of alternate colored dots was sprayed to represent the dappling effect of sunlight through trees. The large turret numbers are painted in blue with a yellow outline. On the glacis plate, the letter 'G' was painted, probably in black, the exact meaning of which is not clear.



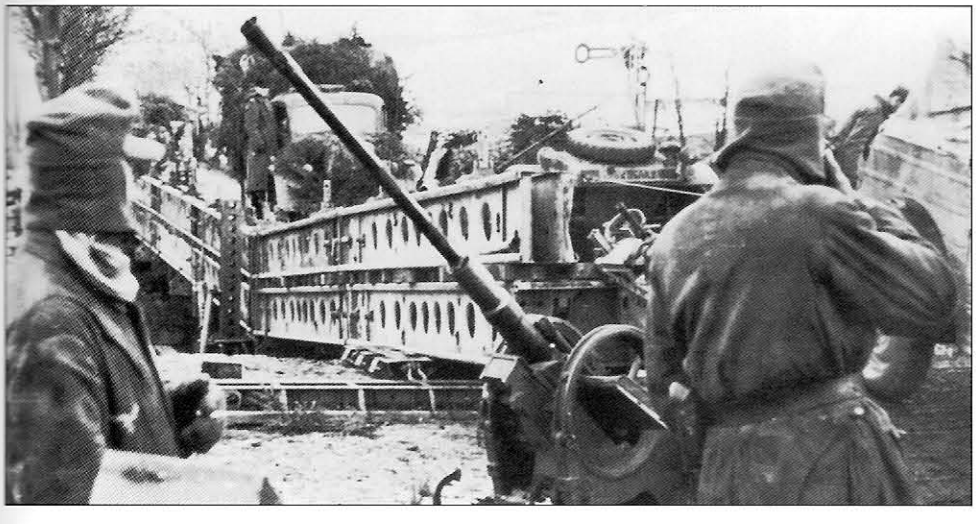
Tiger '222', also shown in Tondorf, displays a sprayed camouflage paint scheme in contrast to the hard edged scheme seen on the majority of other Tigers in this unit. Technically, the numbers on the turret should have been red with a white outline, but various sources suggest they were most likely dark yellow. Without an actual color photo, it is difficult to determine with any degree of accuracy.

Two American soldiers inspect a destroyed Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J from 6.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 knocked out by M10 3" Gun Motor Carriages of the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion near Wirtzfeld on 17 December. This Panzer IV was produced in September-October 1944 after the application of Zimmerit was ordered to be discontinued and is fitted with the new wire mesh Schürzen. Unusually, it is still fitted with the older cylindrical type exhaust muffler that was ordered to be replaced with the two vertical 'Flammentöter' flame suppressing exhausts in August 1944. The penetration point of the shell can be seen in the side of the turret. In the distance, another destroyed Panzer IV can be seen.

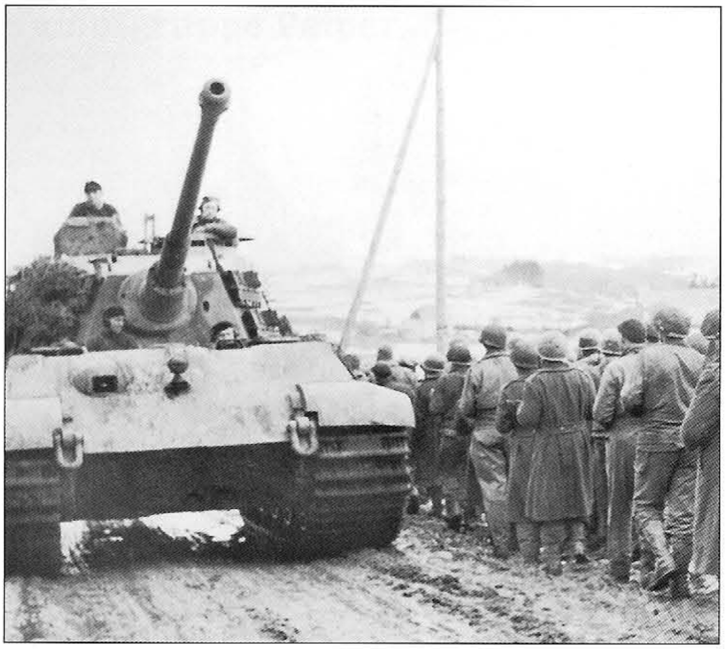




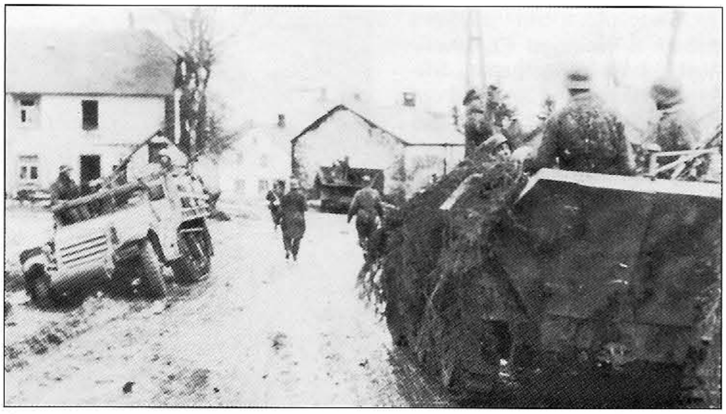
Another late production Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J rolls past a large group of American prisoners waiting beside the road to be escorted back to the German rear lines and captivity. This vehicle is from 7.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and has the tactical number '713' painted in black with a white outline on the turret skirt behind a white outline Balkenkreuz. In August 1944, Pz.Kpfw.IV were ordered to be painted in the 'Hinterhalt' camouflage scheme with a base coat of dark yellow and hard edged patches of dark green and brown applied in the factory. Small spots of alternate colors were applied to simulate sunlight passing through trees.



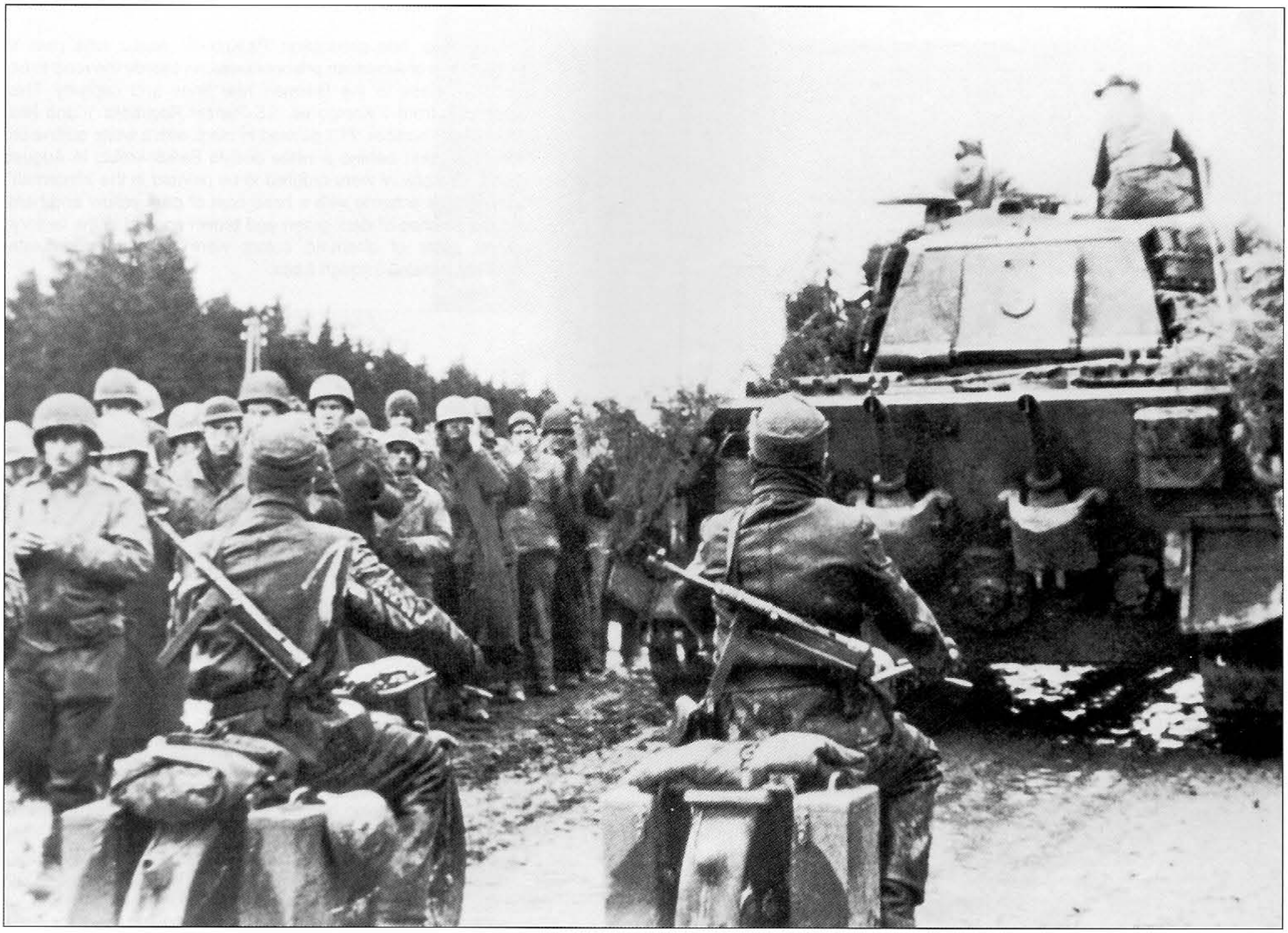
The almost mountainous countryside in the eastern Ardennes limited both armies to using available roads. To overcome the many natural barriers like deep flowing rivers, each German division had engineers for bridge building. The bridges came in two principle types: Brückengerät-B (Bridging Equipment-B) and Brückengerät-J. The B-type was the most common, and most divisions contained a B-type bridging column. However, the heavier J-type bridges, like the one pictured, were more elaborate in construction and were supported by either trestles or pontoons, which could take the heavier loads of the Panzers. Between 5. and 6.Panzer-Armees and 7.Armee, the German forces in the Ardennes had thirteen non divisional Brückengerät-B and nine-Brückengerät-J bridging columns. Here in this photograph taken a few miles from the German-Belgian border, a J-type bridge carried the main road over the Malmédy-Stadtkyll railway line after it had been blown by the retreating Germans. 1.SS-Panzer-Division, which served as the 6.Panzer-Armee spearhead, was forced to find a way around the uncompleted bridge at the start of their advance. A 2cm FlaK38 anti-aircraft gun manned by Luftwaffe personnel has been set up to protect the bridge from Allied aircraft.



A Tiger II from schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 passes a column of dejected prisoners from the 99th Infantry Division marching into captivity near Merlscheid. Surprise, coupled with thick fog, allowed the German assault to advance almost on top of the American positions before they had time to react. This vehicle also has a sprayed 'Hinterhalt' camouflage scheme.

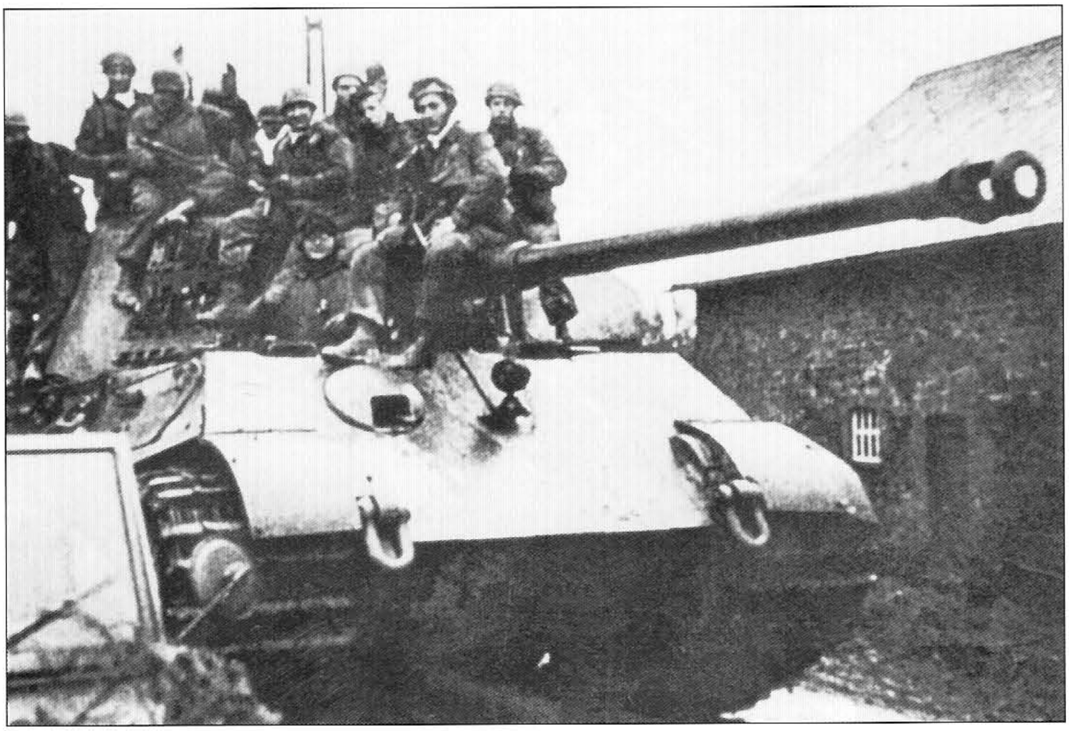


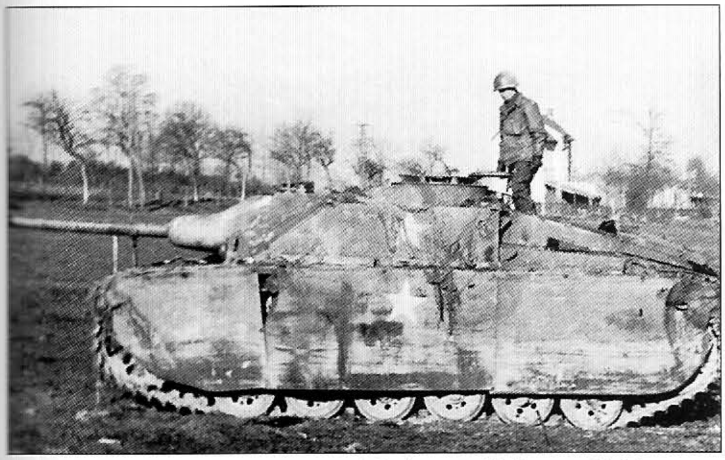
An Sd.Kfz.251/1 Ausf.D half-track, probably from III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, enters Honsfeld on 17 December. When the leading units of Kampfgruppe Peiper entered the town, elements of the 99th Infantry Division and 14th Cavalry Group were caught by surprise and offered little resistance. Approximately 15 anti-tank guns, 80 trucks and 50 other vehicles including half-tracks were captured. Here, an M3 half-track is being checked out by its new owners. Note in the background the Flakpanzer IV Möbelwagen mounting the 3.7cm FlaK43.



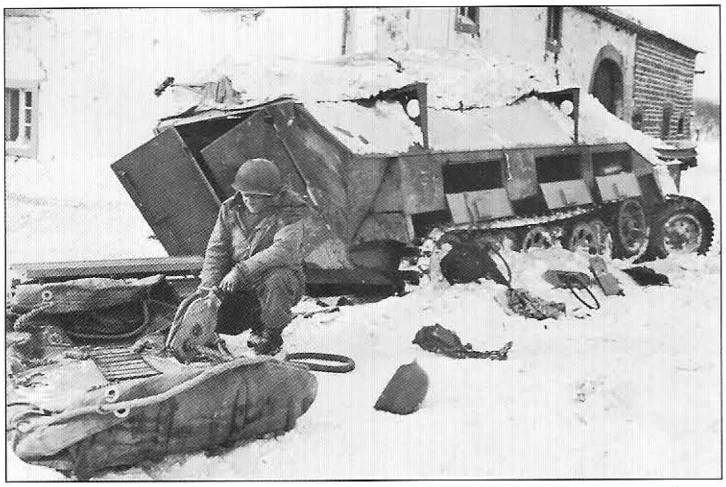
This may be the same Tiger II as in the photo above, advancing down the road from Merlscheid towards Lanzerath past the column of prisoners from the 99th Infantry Division. Two motorcyclists armed with MP40 machine pistols follow behind on their DKW NZ350 motorcycles. Both men are wearing two piece black leather suits.

Tiger '222' carries a load of Fallschirmjäger from Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9 into battle through Deidenberg on 18 December. Late on 16 December, Peiper was informed that 3.Fallschirmjäger-Division had cleared a route through Lanzerath and that Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9 was fighting west of the town. He immediately ordered the Kampfgruppe towards Lanzerath to take advantage of the gap that had been created and while there, against the wishes of their commanding officer, requested that I./FJR 9 be assigned to accompany them. At Honsfeld, the Fallschirmjäger battalion was returned to its original command, however some of them continued on until Stoumont and Stavelot.

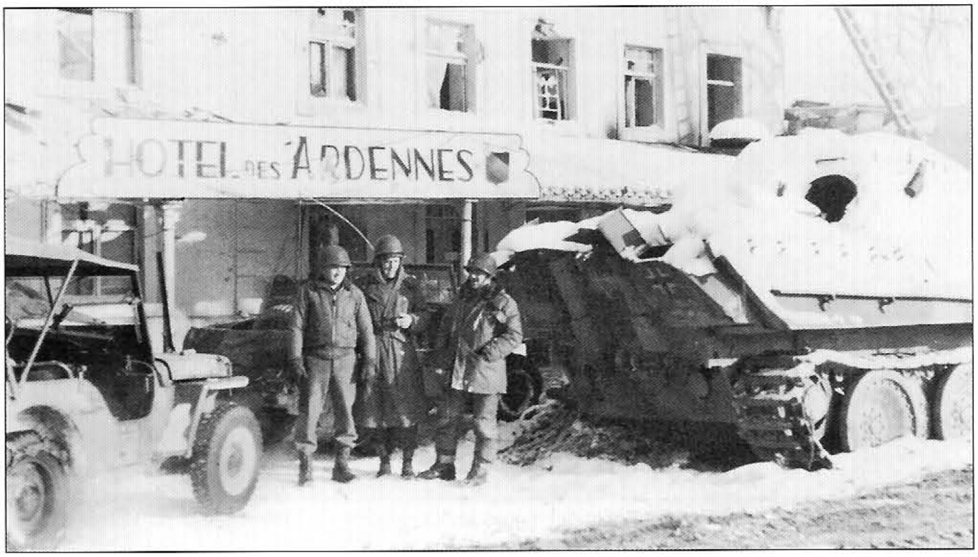




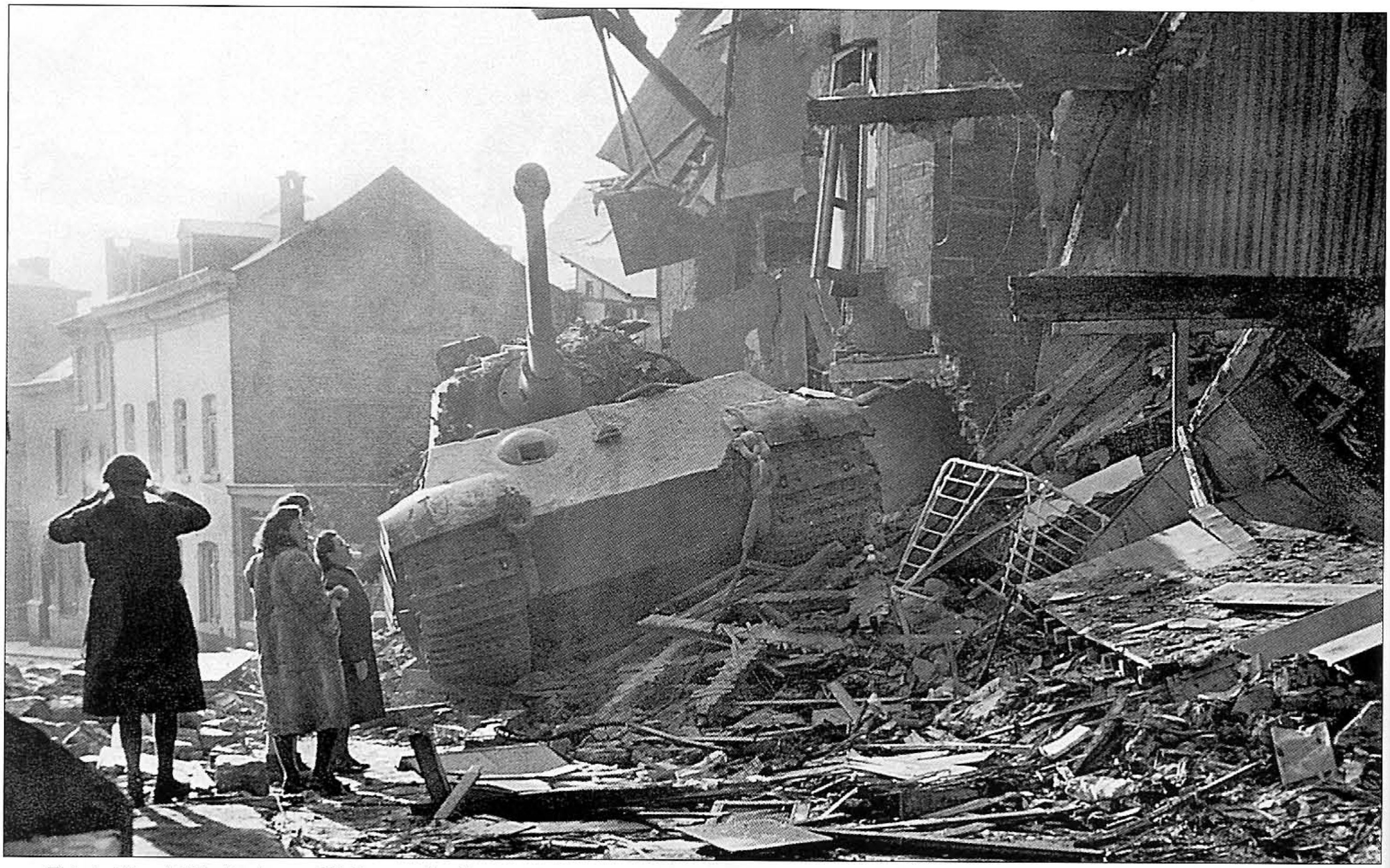
This burned out Panther Ausf.G from 1.SS-Panzer-Division was knocked out near the crossroads at Baugnez. The tactical number ,'111', can be faintly seen on the side of the turret. It was produced in late September 1944, after the discontinuation of Zimmerit and the introduction of the reinforced chin gun mantlet but before the larger diameter self-cleaning idler was introduced. Note the unusual location of the Balkenkreuz on the side of the hull just in front of the spare track links.



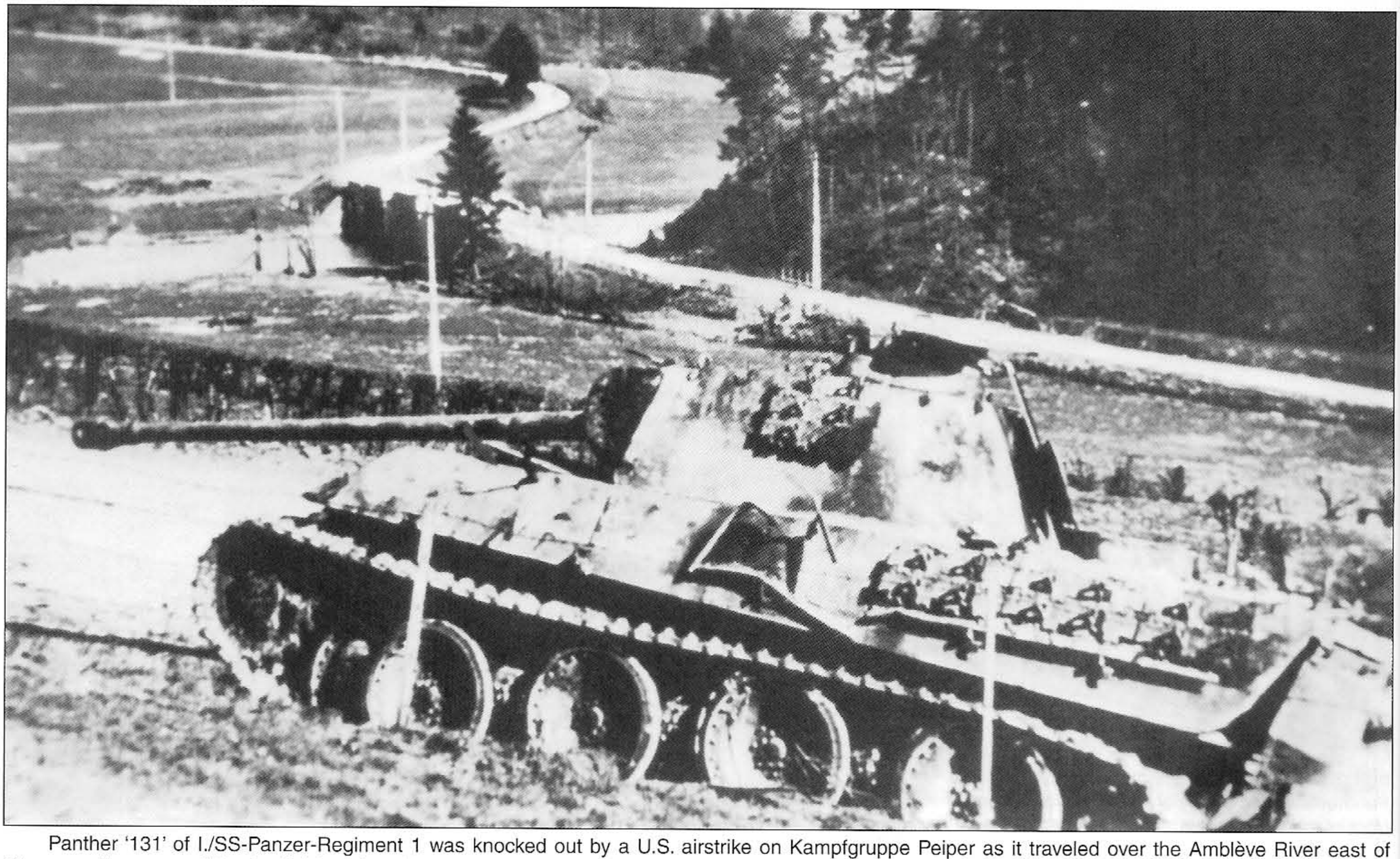
An American soldier from the 1st Infantry Division inspects a bellows used to inflate a rubber dinghy that was found inside this Sd.Kfz.251/7 Ausf.D engineers half-track knocked out in Amblève. Amblève was on the route assigned to Kampfgruppe Hansen but as the rear of Kampfgruppe Peiper also passed through on 17 December, it is impossible to determine to which unit it belonged.



SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, adjutant of I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, commanded this Panther knocked out by a 3-inch anti-tank gun in front of the Hotel Des Ardennes in Ligneuville on 17 December. This photo was taken after the town was recaptured on 16 January 1945.

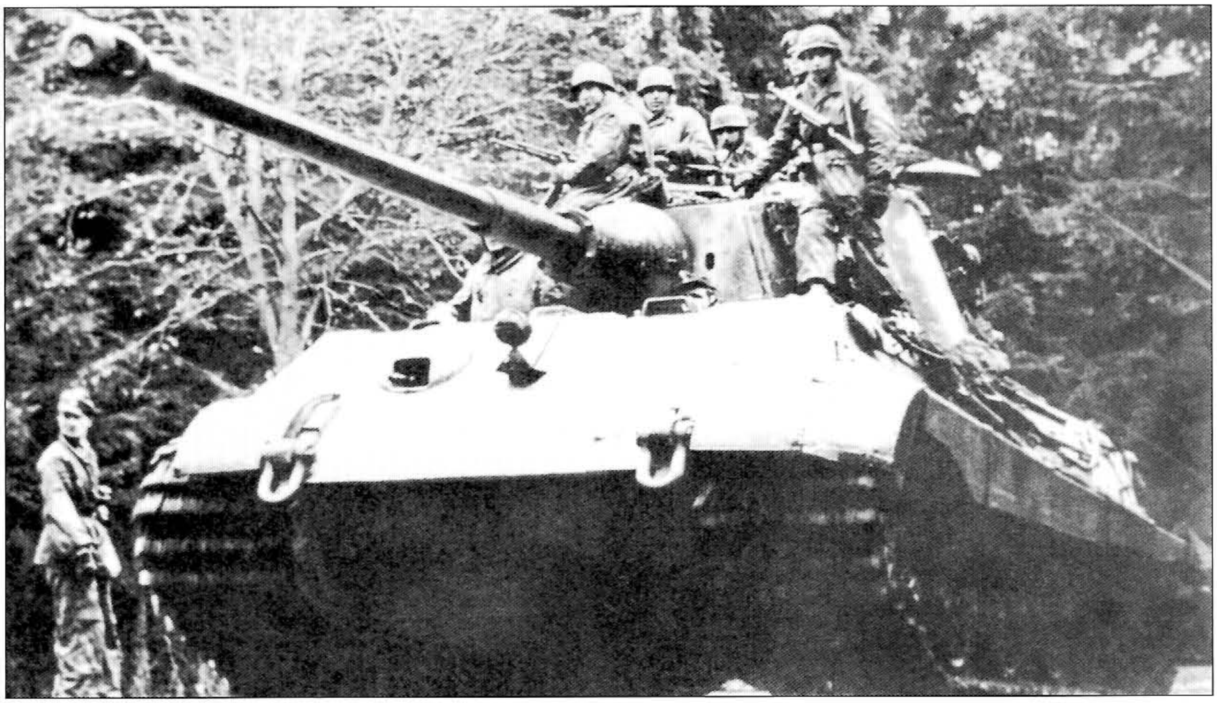


This is Tiger '105' of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Jürgen Wessel which was abandoned when it became stuck in the debris of a building as the driver attempted to reverse down the street in the face of a localized American bazooka attack. Although the main body of Kampfgruppe Peiper had passed through Stavelot early on 18 December, it had already moved on towards Trois Ponts by the time the Tigers of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 arrived and small pockets of American resistance still defended the town. This was the first of the unit's Tigers lost.

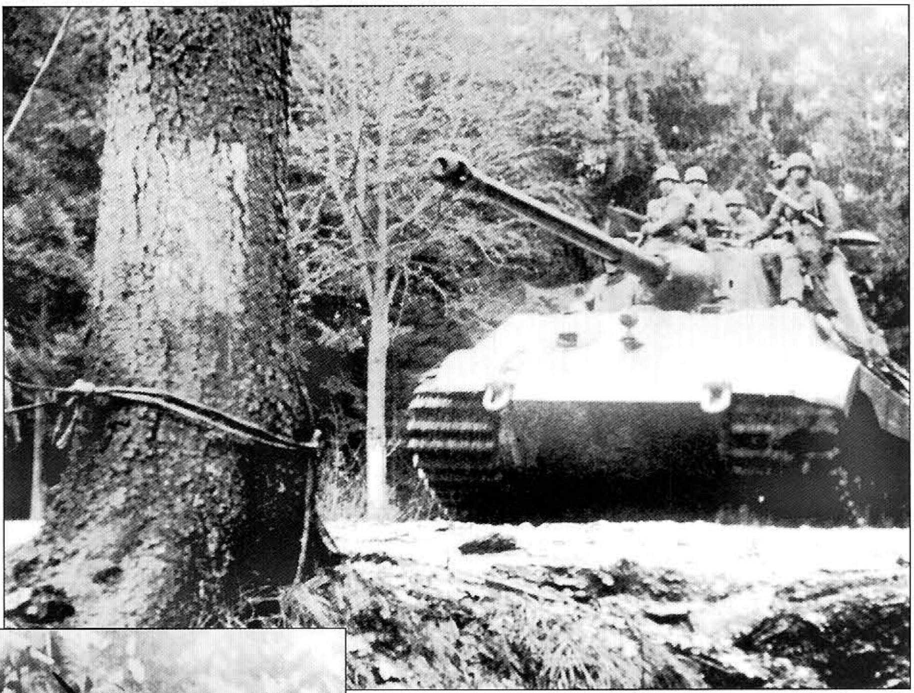


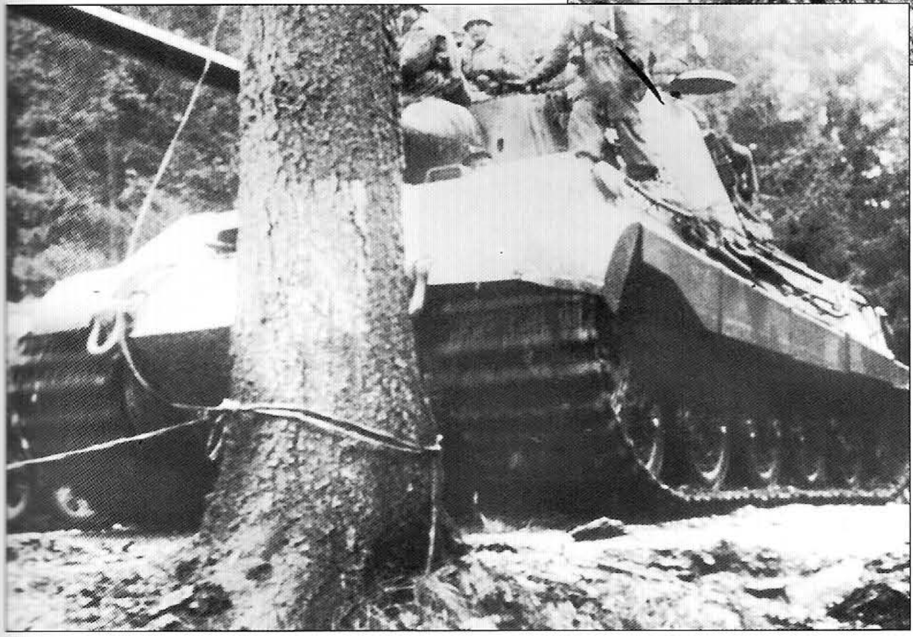
Panther '131' of I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was knocked out by a U.S. airstrike on Kampfgruppe Peiper as it traveled over the Amblève River east of Cheneux. Here, one of the few bridges found intact by Peiper can be seen in the background with the road to La Gleize in the distance.

Tiger '222' with its complement of paratroopers from 1./FJR 9 approaches the crossroads at Kaiserbaracke located halfway between Malmédy and St. Vith, heading towards Ligneuville. Standing on the left, SS-Oberscharführer Persin can be seen keeping watch on the traffic. The four paratroopers have been identified as Obergefreiter Koos and Oberjägers Lenz, Löwe and Hess.



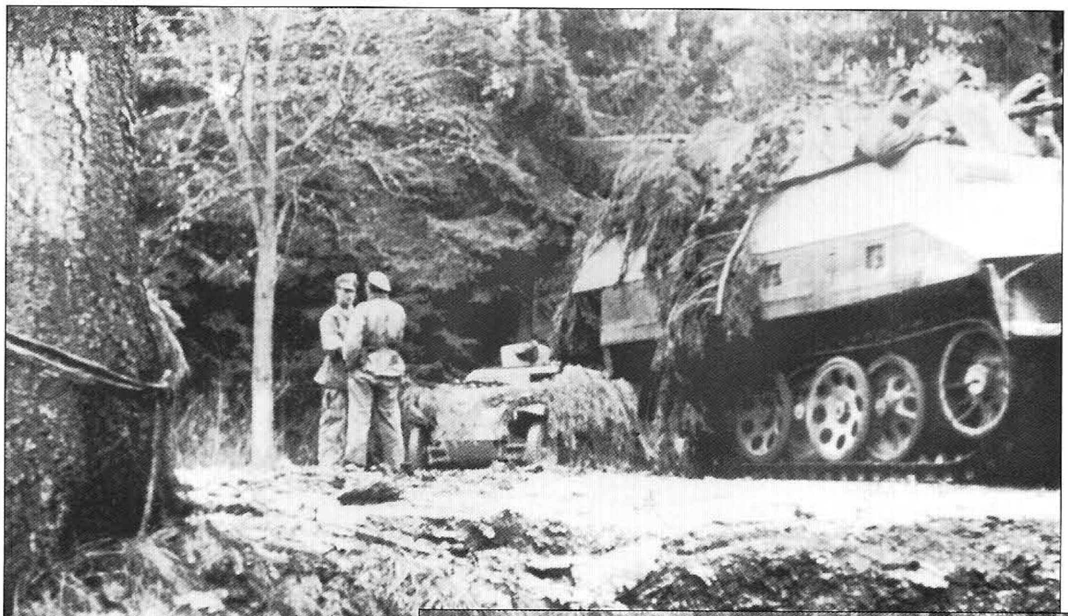
SS-Sturmbannführer Gustav Knittel, commander of Kampfgruppe Knittel, left, confers with the adjutant of his staff company, SS-Obersturmführer Heinrich Goltz in the hamlet of La Vaulx-Richard near Stavelot on 18 December. They followed Kampfgruppe Peiper through the town, but later that afternoon elements of the 30th Infantry Division and 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion recaptured Stavelot.



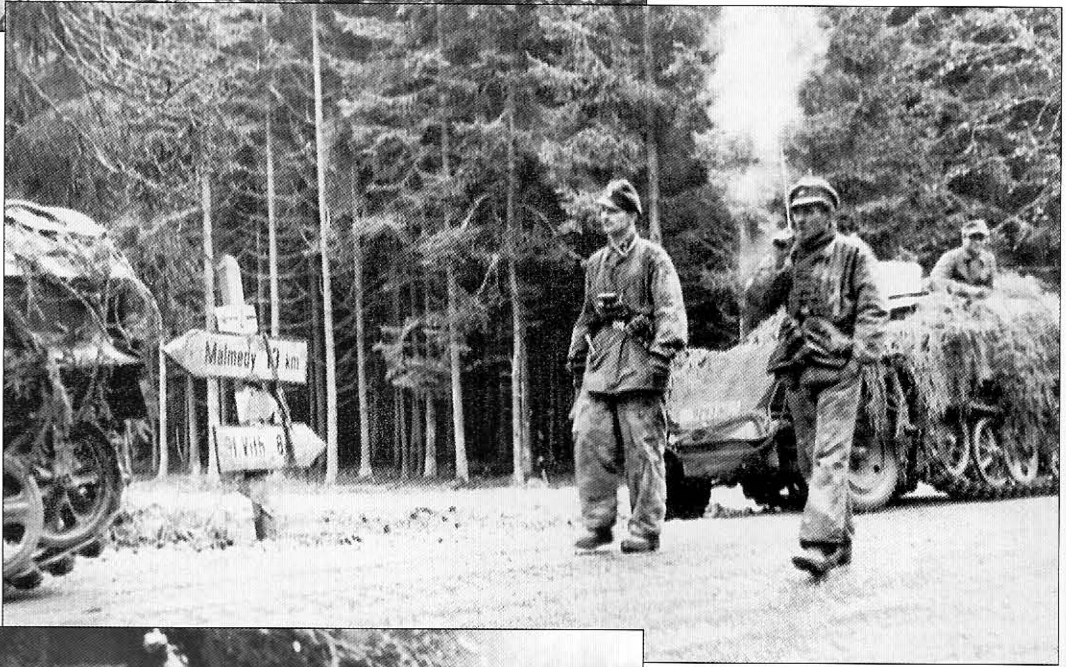


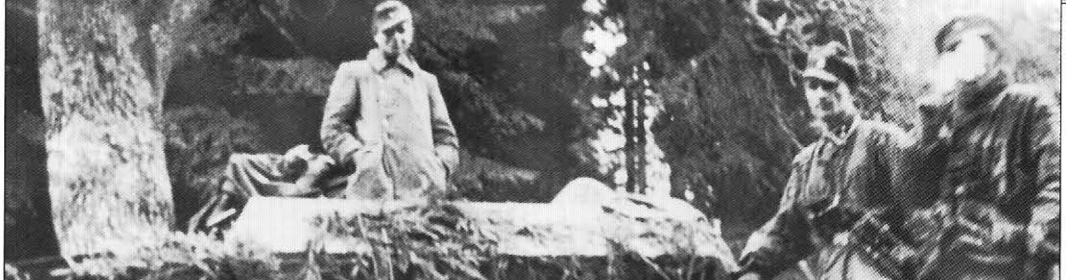
Two more photos of Tiger '222' as it rolls through the crossroads at Kaiserbaracke on its way to Ligneuville. Early in the war, the Fallschirmjäger divisions had earned a reputation as elite troops however, since the landings at Crete, they had been utilized mostly in the role of ground infantry. 5.Fallschirmjäger-Division, assigned to 7.Armee, was the only other paratrooper unit used in the ground role during the operation. Note that the front corner section of the mudguard has been bolted on the wrong side of the tank – it belongs on the right side.

Two SS-Kriegsberichter were on hand to record the movement of Kampfgruppe Knittel and Kampfgruppe Hansen along the road from St. Vith to Malmédy. In this photograph, SS-Oberscharführer Persin and SS-Unterscharführer Ochsner shake hands at the crossroads at Kaiserbaracke while an Sd.Kfz.251/1 Ausf.D half-track of Kampfgruppe Hansen turns west toward Recht.



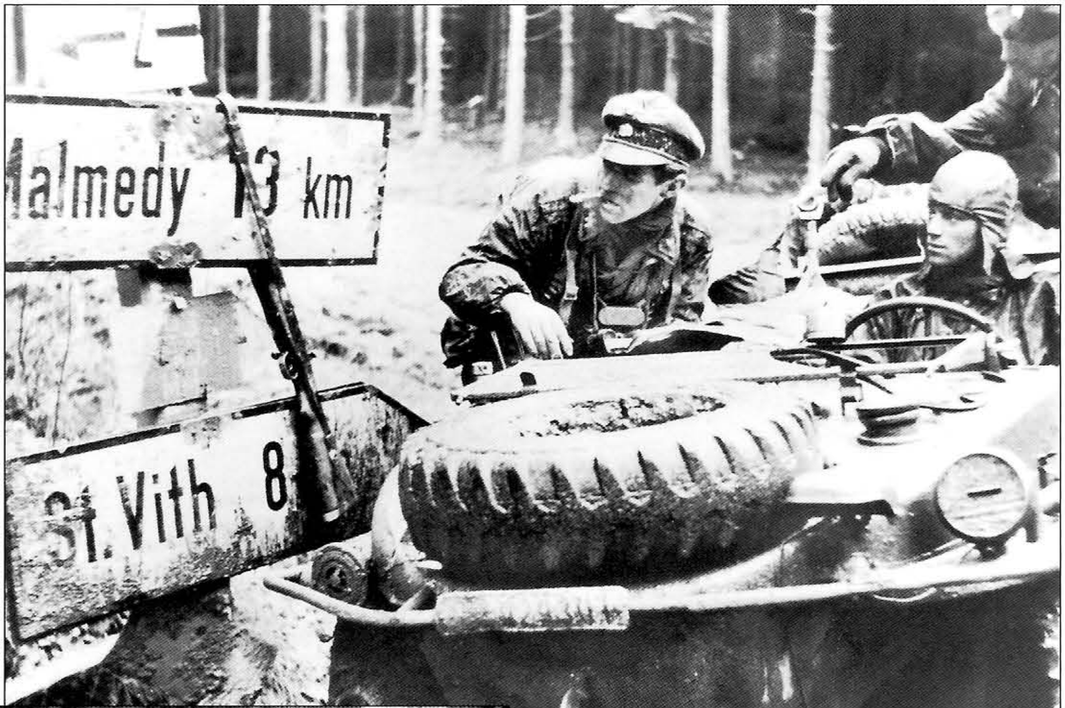
SS-Oberscharführer Persin and SS-Unterscharführer Ochsner turn and walk north past the crossroads while the SS-Kriegsberichter continues to photograph. In the background is an Sd.Kfz.250 'Neue' half-track and the rear of another can just be seen to the left of the signpost. The 'Malmédy' sign was damaged and the photographer has slung a discarded American rifle over it to balance it for the photos.





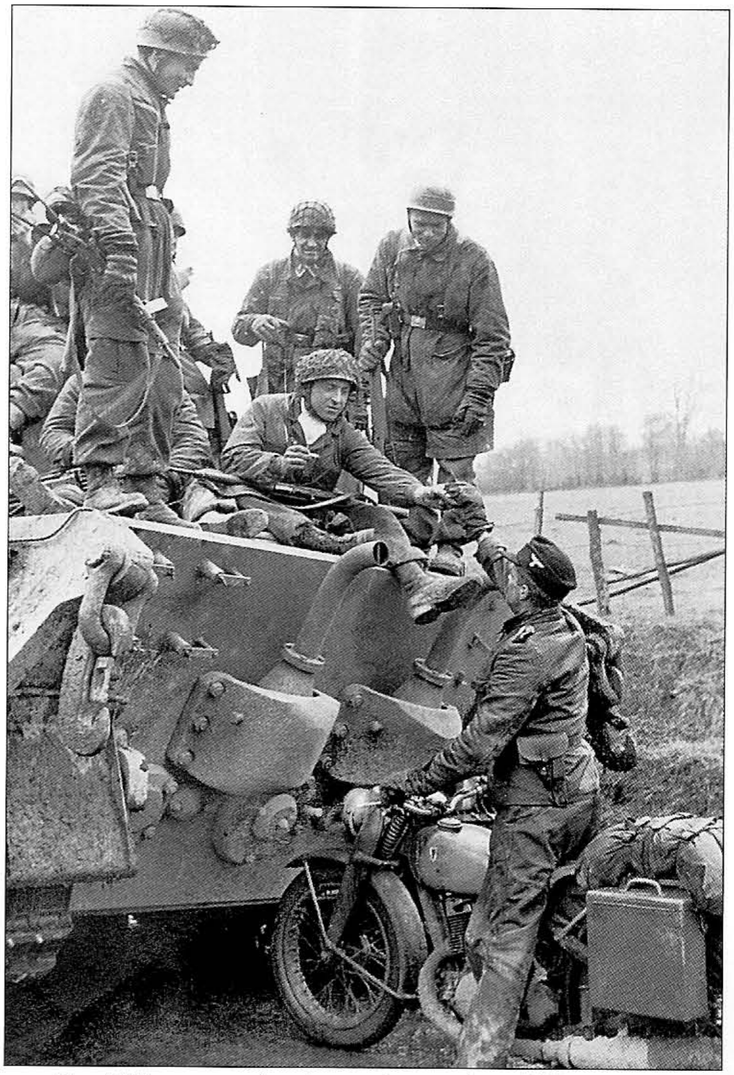
The two men continue their walk and the Sd.Kfz.250 'Neue' half-track to the left of the signpost comes into view. Ochsner can be seen smoking a liberated American cigar.

One of the most recognized images to come out of the Ardennes Offensive, shows SS-Unterscharführer Ochsner with his cigar back in his Schwimmwagen, now parked beside the sign on the opposite side of the road, with SS-Oberscharführer Persin visible behind his driver in this staged photograph.

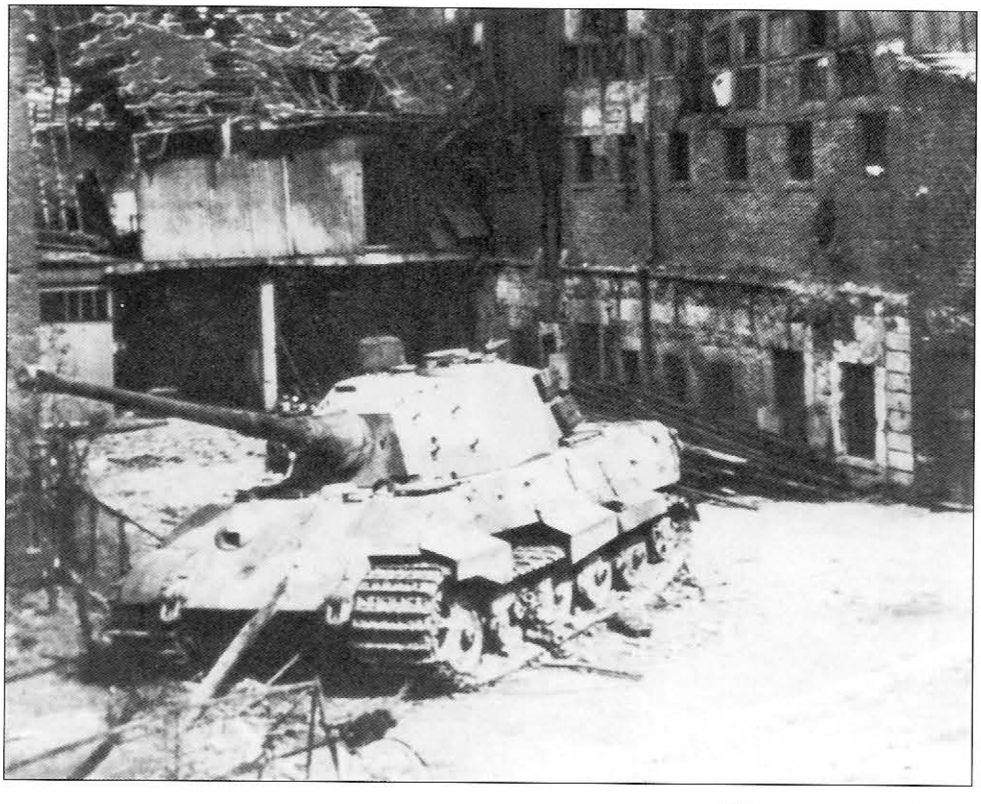


Sd.Kfz.251s of Kampfgruppe Knittel roll north past the crossroads at Kaiserbaracke toward Ligneuville.

A 12cm Granatwerfer 42 heavy mortar being towed by a Steyr 1500A/02 personnel car from Kampfgruppe Hansen disappears around the corner in the direction of Recht while Sd.Kfz.250 'Neue' half-tracks of Kampfgruppe Knittel continue on toward Ligneuville.

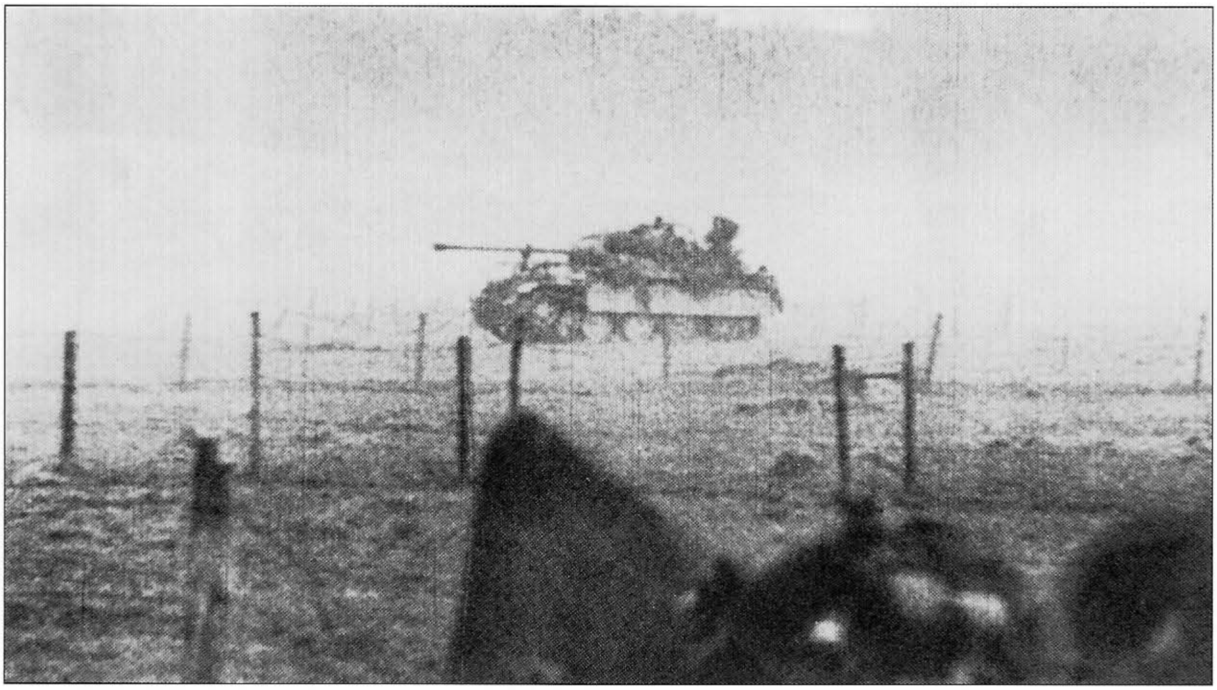


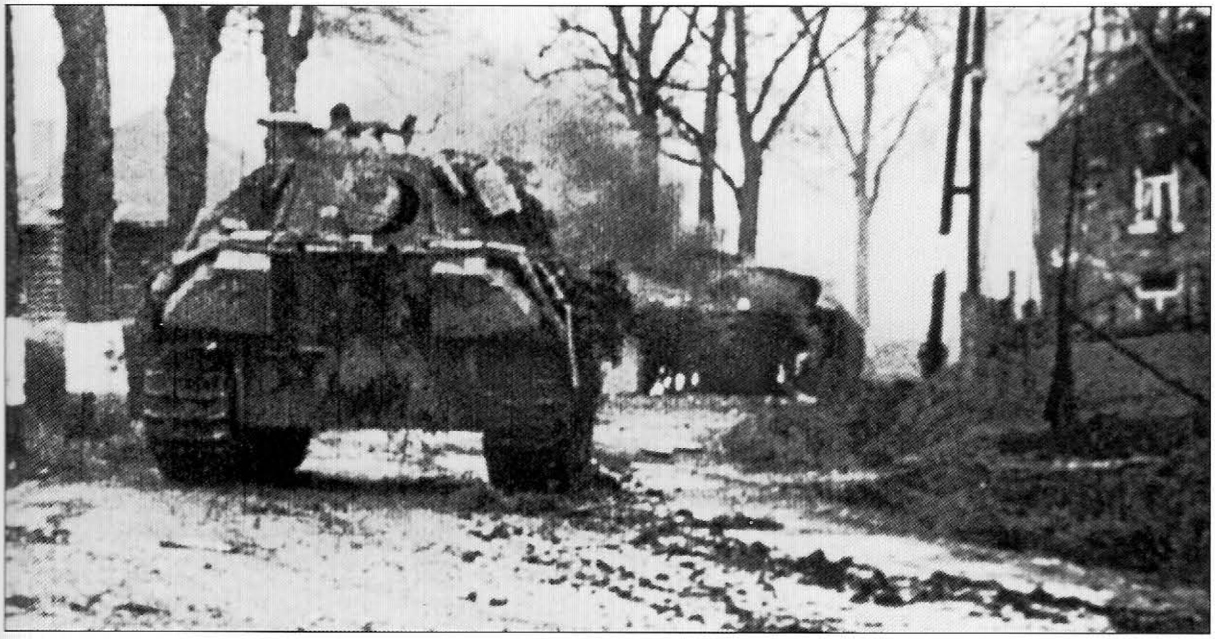
Tiger '222', now carrying nine paratroopers from I./FJR 9, halts along the road near Ligneuville on 19 December. Here they share captured American cigarettes with one of the SS motorcyclists on the DKW NZ350 seen earlier. They are armed with a variety of weapons including a captured Sten Mk.II, an MG42, a Gewehr 43 and a MP44. In the two right photos, the paratroopers have all moved to the front of the Tiger for a photograph with its commander, SS-Oberscharführer Kurt Sowa.



On the afternoon of 19 December, Kampfgruppe Sandig, accompanied by some Pz.Kpfw.IV's of 7.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and some Tiger II's from schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, attempted to take Stavelot from the Americans who themselves had just recaptured the town the day before. Here, Tiger '222' was immobilized on the south side of the Ambléve bridge by one of the M10 tank destroyers of the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion located on the north side of the river. U.S. Army engineers blew up the bridge that evening blocking any further German attempts to cross the river there.

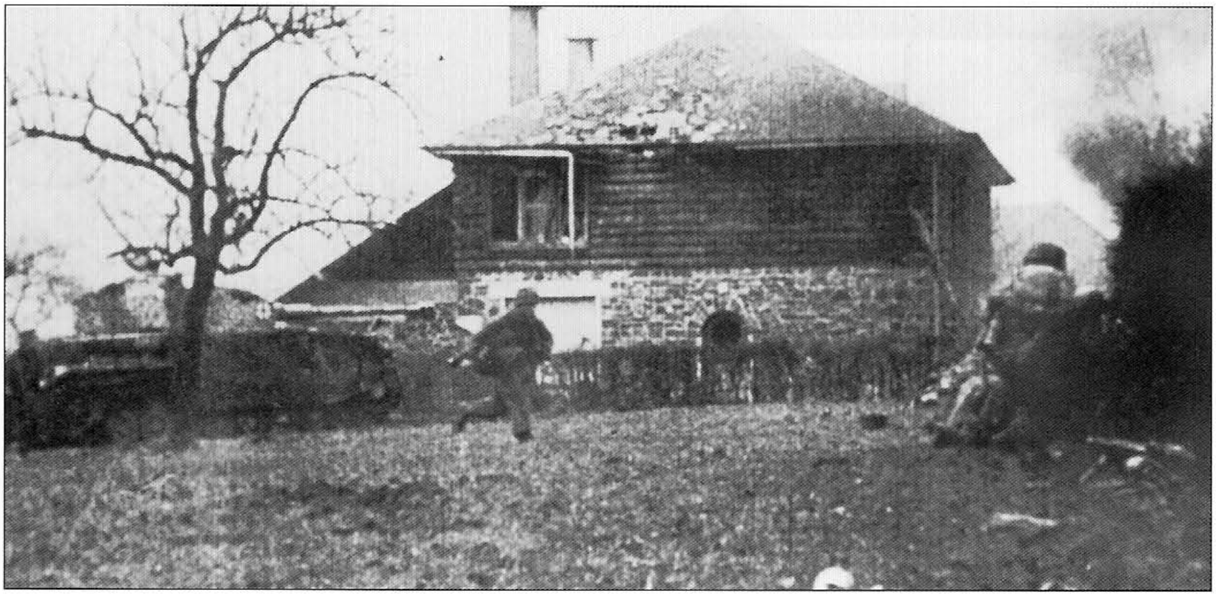
In the early morning mist on 19 December, the armored spearhead of Kampfgruppe Peiper, consisting of seven Panthers and two Pz.Kpfw.IV's, advanced from La Gleize, west toward the town of Stoumont. Here, a Panther of 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 passes an abandoned American 3-inch anti-tank gun on the road between the two towns.

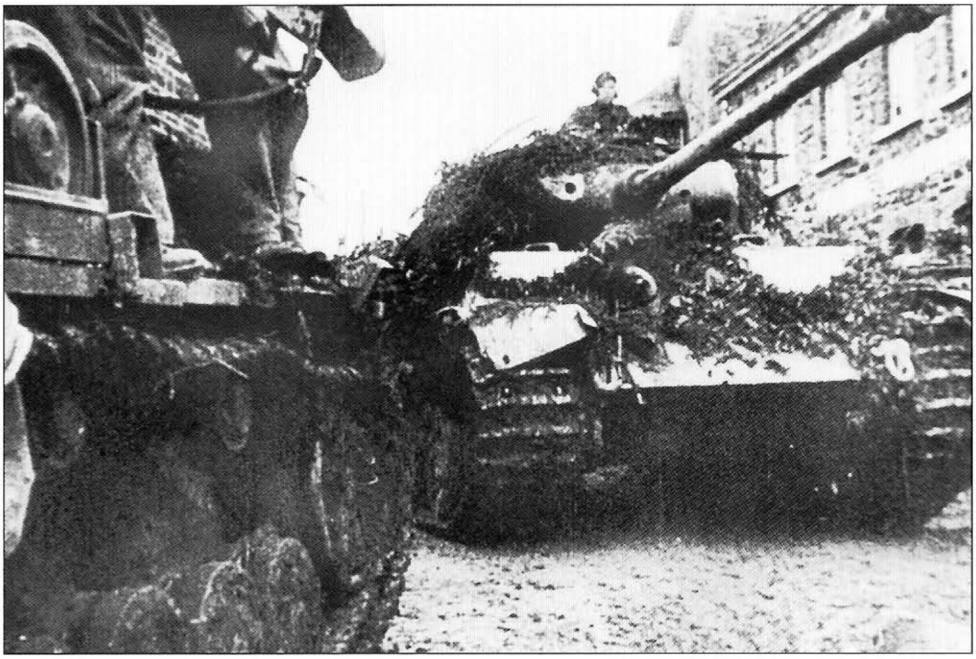




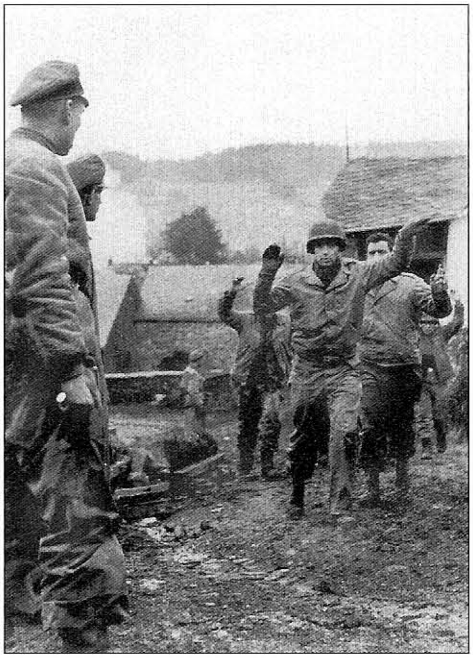
Approaching Stoumont, the leading Panther Ausf.G is brought to a halt with a hit from a 90mm anti-aircraft gun situated in the town. As smoke pours from the wreckage, the second Panther cautiously advances.

As smoke billows from the burning Panther, a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J from 6.Kompanie, accompanied by some of the paratroopers from I./FJR 9, tries to move into position to take the enemy gun under fire. In the background is the Robinson House, looking much today as it did on that foggy morning in December 1944.

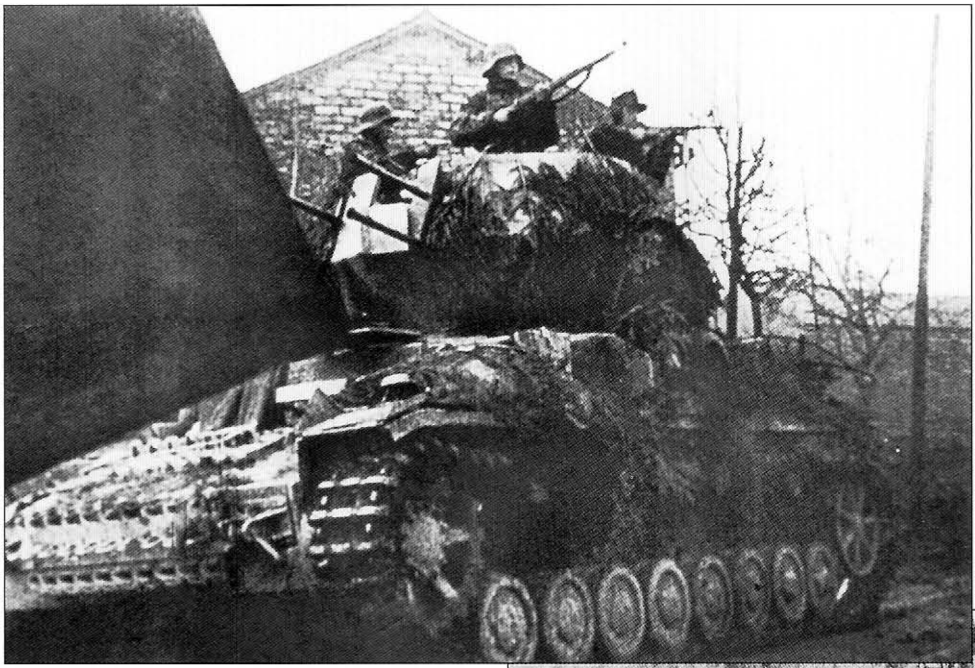




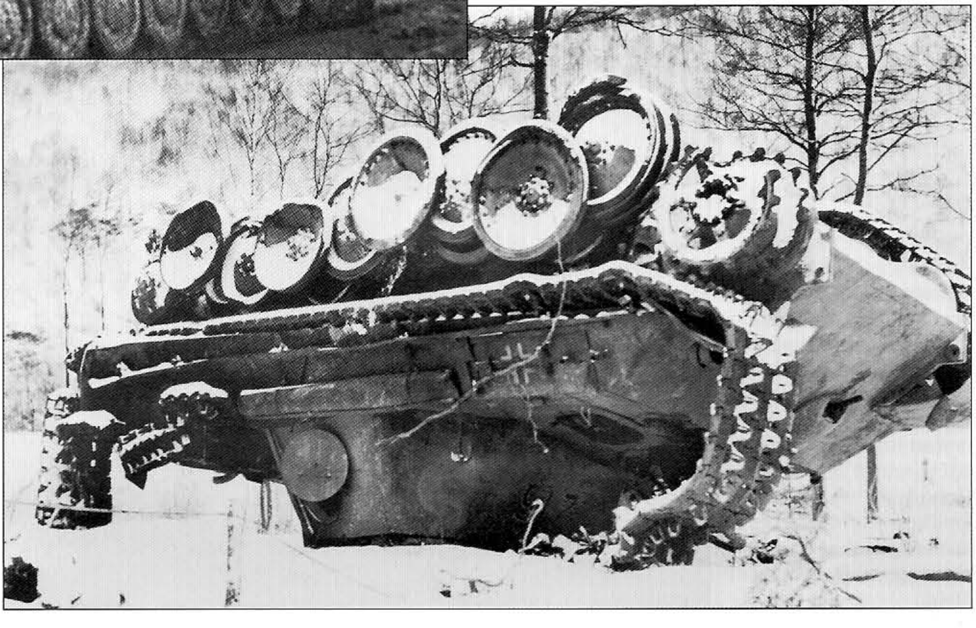
The battle for Stoumont was over before noon. Here, one of the Panthers of 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 moves down the main street, past a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J of 6.Kompanie, in pursuit of the Shermans of the 743rd Tank Regiment that had hurriedly withdrawn.



SS-Sturmbannführer Josef Diefenthal watches as American soldiers of the 119th Infantry Regiment, 30th Infantry Division are marched back up the road toward La Gleize. In two days they would be free again, left in La Gleize when Kampfgruppe Peiper withdrew on Christmas Eve.

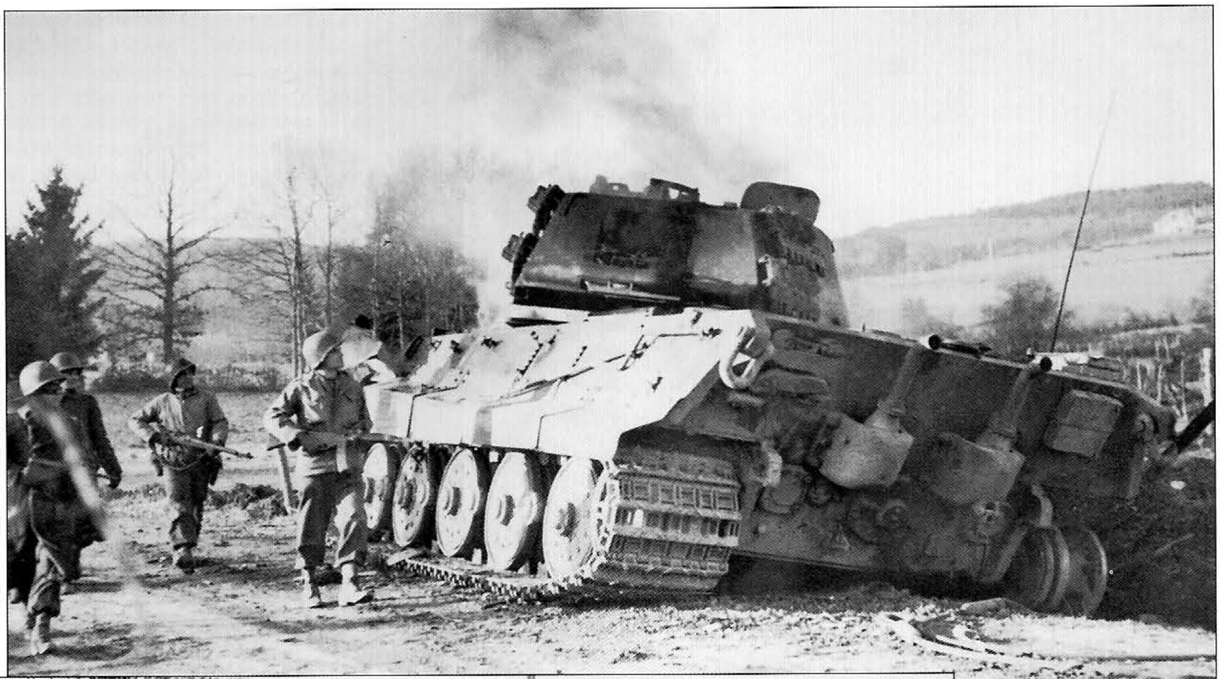


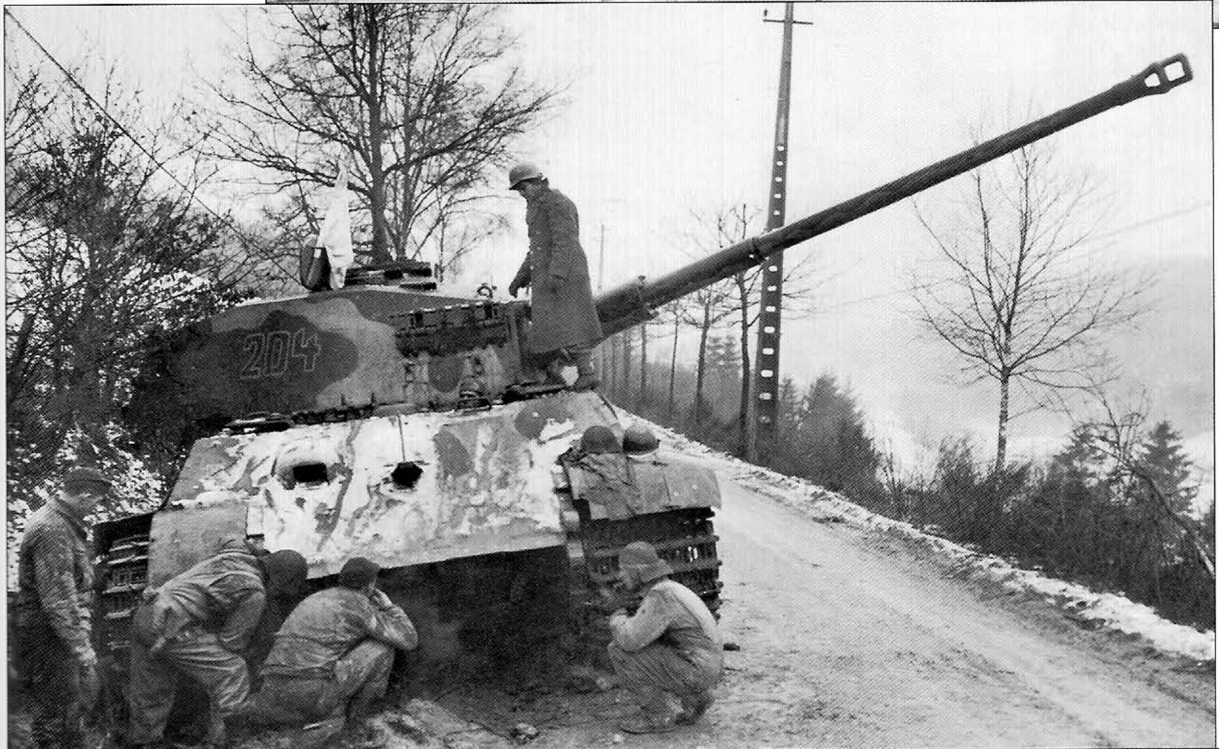
At least two Flakpanzer IV Wirbelwind accompanied Kampfgruppe Peiper during its advance to Stoumont. Here, the crew is helping mop up small pockets of resistance in the town. This one has been built on a remanufactured hull of a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.G.

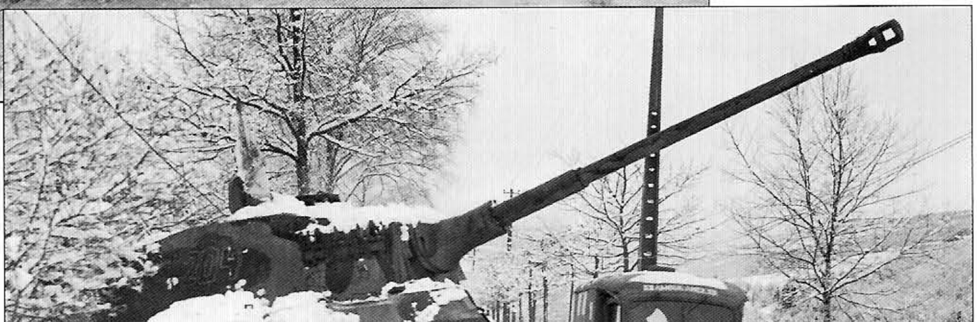


Panther Ausf.G '215' rests upside down near Stoumont railway station, marking the furthest advance of Kampfgruppe Peiper. It was the first of three Panthers knocked out by Shermans laying in wait just west of the railway station and was bulldozed off the road and overturned after the battle.

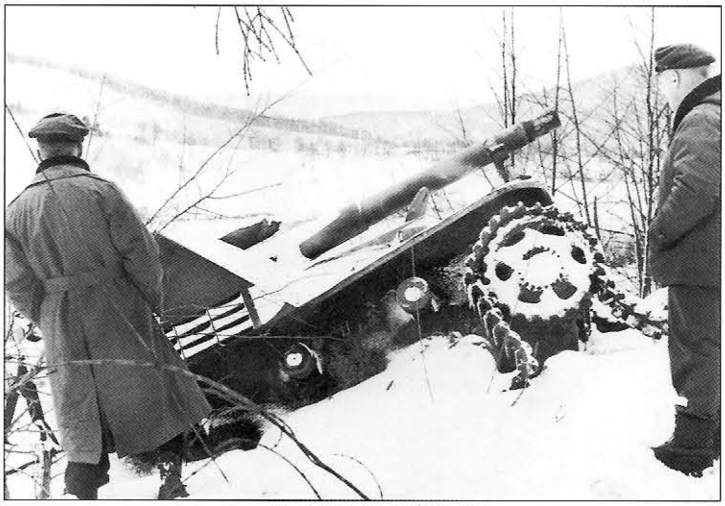
This Tiger II of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 was abandoned by Kampfgruppe Peiper east of La Gleize on 19 December after throwing a track. This photo was taken just after the town was reoccupied by the Americans and was probably staged, the smoke likely coming from a smoke grenade. Note the G.I. carrying the MP44 assault rifle.



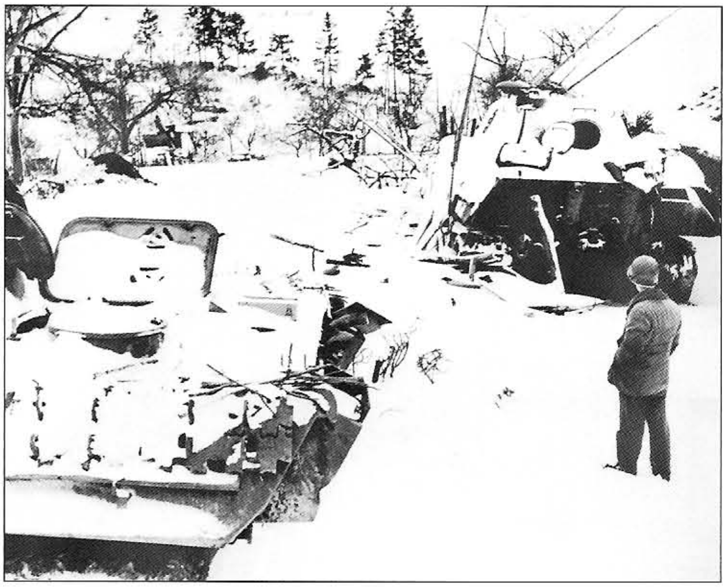




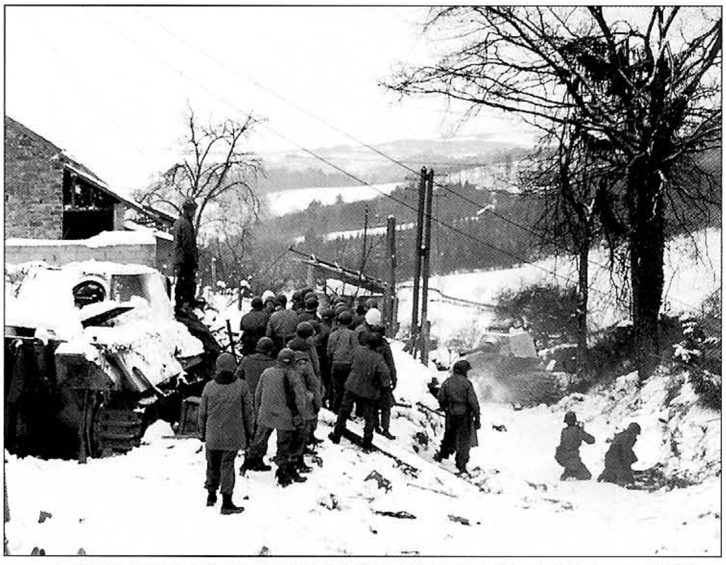
Two photos of Tiger II '204' of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 on the road from La Gleize to Spa. Abandoned by Kampfgruppe Peiper in La Gleize, U.S. Army engineers succeeded in restarting it and drove it as far as this spot north of Ruy where it broke down and they were unable to restart it. It was later pushed off the road into the valley on the right. This 2.Kompanie vehicle has the tactical number on the turret painted in red with a white outline and is painted in red oxide primer with hardedge bands of dark yellow and green. The 'Hinterhalt' camouflage scheme can just be made out on some parts of the turret and hull. Note as well the unit emblem, crossed skeleton keys within a shield above two oak leaves painted in white on the right side of the hull.



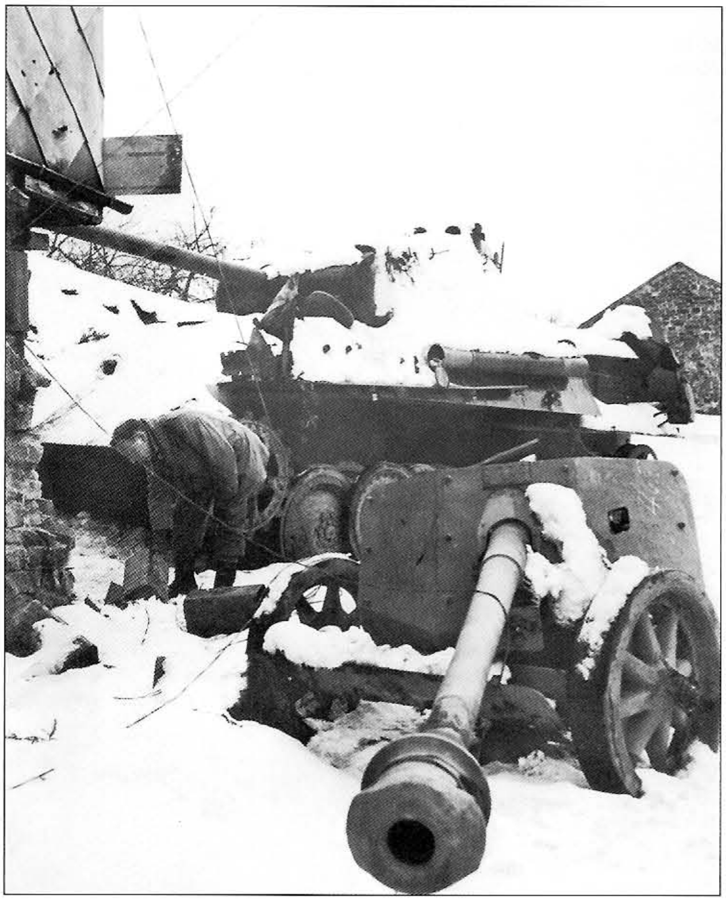
This Sd.Kfz.165 Hummel self-propelled gun mounting the 15cm sFH18 howitzer, once belonging to SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 1, was destroyed by Sherman tanks of Task Force Lovelady near Coo on 20 December. Two U.S. Ninth Air Force pilots inspect the destruction.



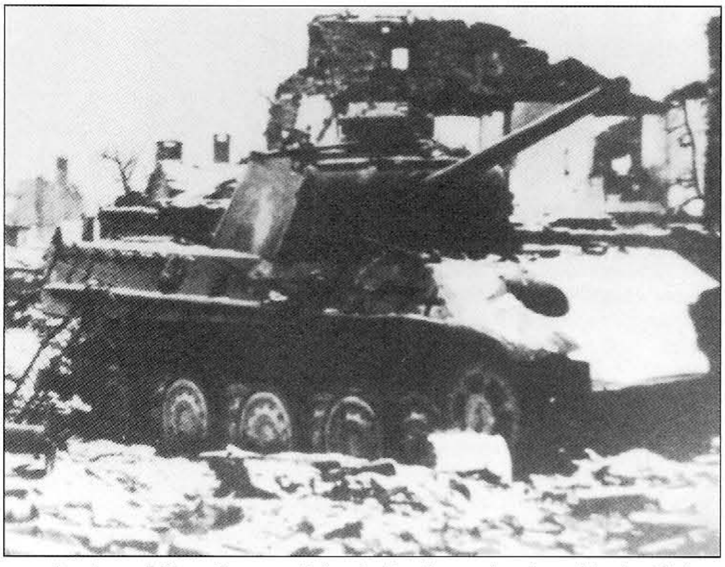
Two Panthers from SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 lie covered in snow south of the La Gleize church after the remnants of Kampfgruppe Peiper withdrew on foot on Christmas Eve. Leaving a small rearguard, Peiper led what was left of his command – about eight hundred men – south toward the hamlet of La Venne. In the background above the open engine deck hatch, can be seen one of the six Sd.Kfz.138/1 Grille Ausf.M from SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 also left behind.



A large group of American soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division observe as practice rounds are fired at an abandoned Tiger II from s.SS-Pz.Abt.501 by a bazooka team in La Gleize on 18 January 1945. To the left is one of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1's Panthers left behind when Kampfgruppe Peiper withdrew.

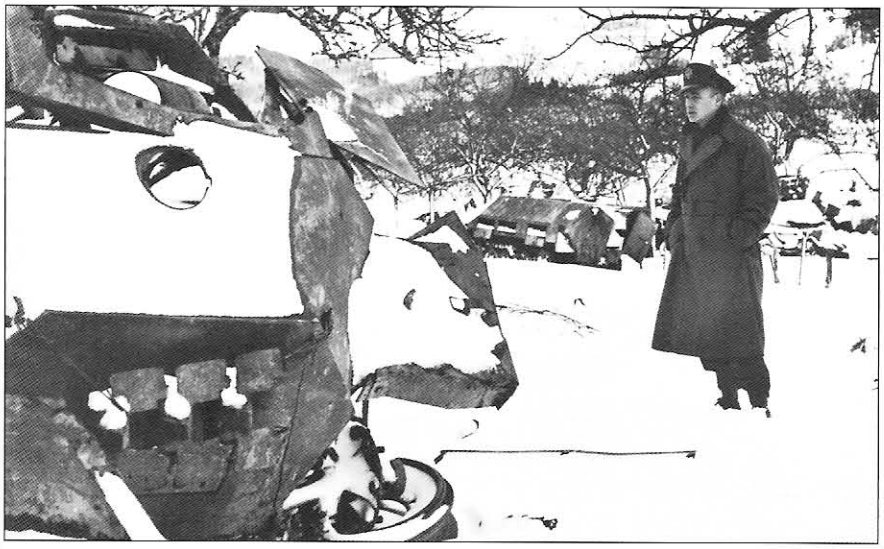


A 7.5cm PaK40 anti-tank gun covering the main road at the western edge of Stoumont sits beside an abandoned Panther Ausf.G of 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.

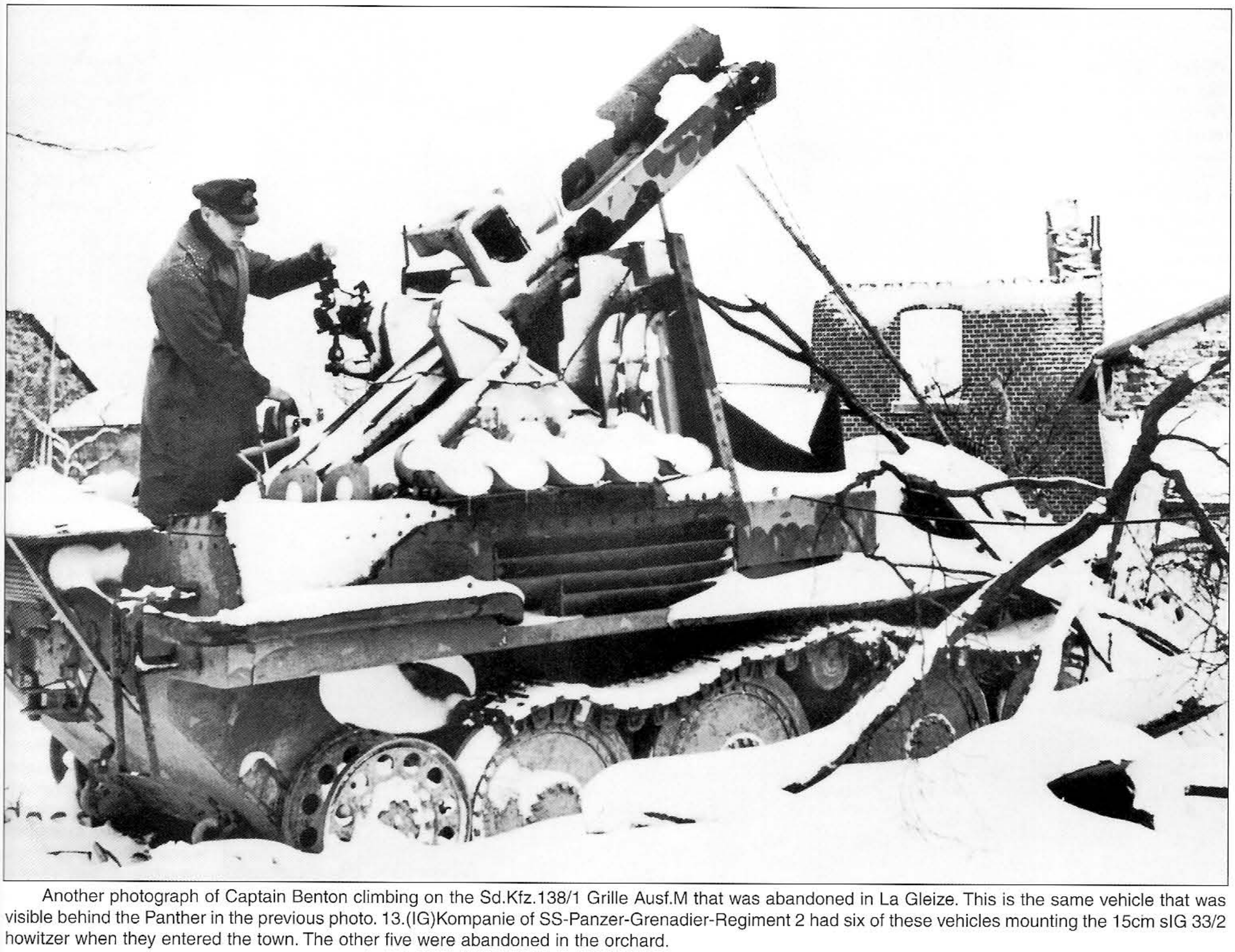


Another of Kampfgruppe Peiper's Panthers abandoned in La Gleize. This one is one of twenty Panthers produced by M.A.N. in late September 1944 equipped with experimental steel tired roadwheels the same as used on the Tiger I and Tiger II. It had the tactical number '221' painted on the side of the turret in black with a stenciled white outline.

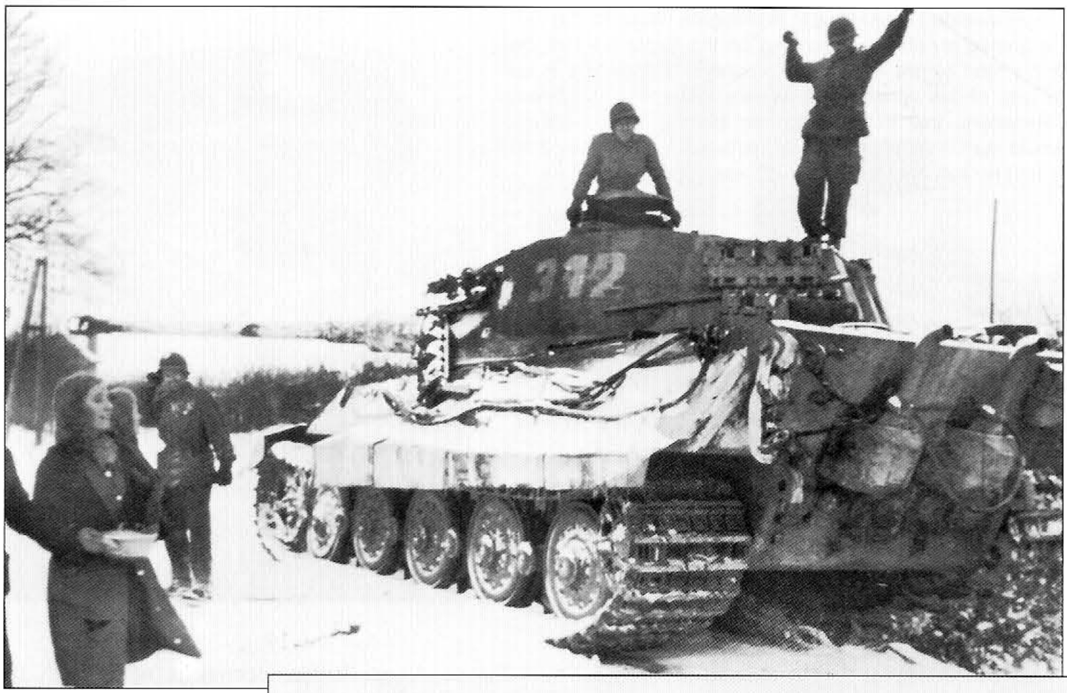
SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper was awarded the swords to his Knight's Cross for the part he played in the Ardennes Offensive. Having gained a ruthless reputation on the Eastern Front, he demonstrated his compassion and loyalty to his men before leaving the wounded to their fate in La Gleize. He tried to obtain assurance from one of his American prisoners, Major Hal McCown, commanding officer of the 2/119 Infantry Regiment, that in exchange for leaving behind all the American prisoners, that the Americans would turn the wounded Germans back after they had recovered. McCown of course replied that he had no authority to make such assurances.



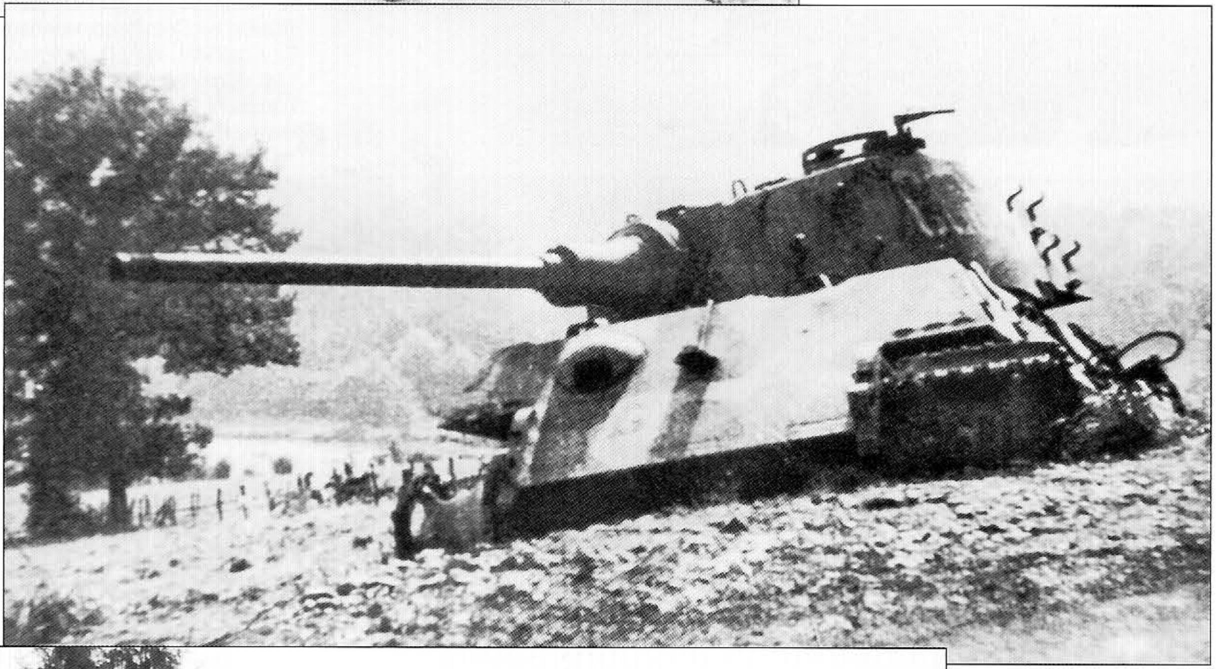
Captain Alfred Benton, operations officer with IX Tactical Air Command, wanders among the wreckage of the Sd.Kfz.251/1 Ausf.D half-tracks of Kampfgruppe Peiper destroyed by their crews in the orchard between the Wérimont Farm and the town of La Gleize. Approximately twenty-five of them were found here.



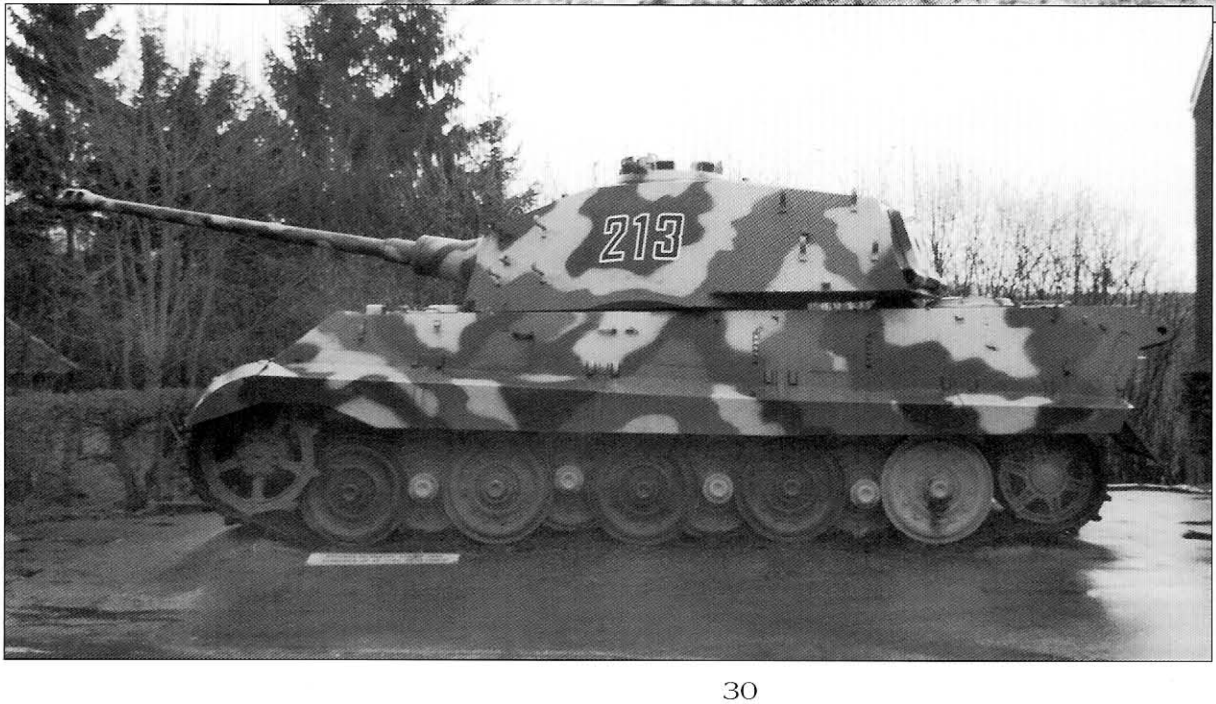
Another photograph of Captain Benton climbing on the Sd.Kfz.138/1 Grille Ausf.M that was abandoned in La Gleize. This is the same vehicle that was visible behind the Panther in the previous photo. 13.(IG)Kompanie of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 had six of these vehicles mounting the 15cm sIG 33/2 howitzer when they entered the town. The other five were abandoned in the orchard.



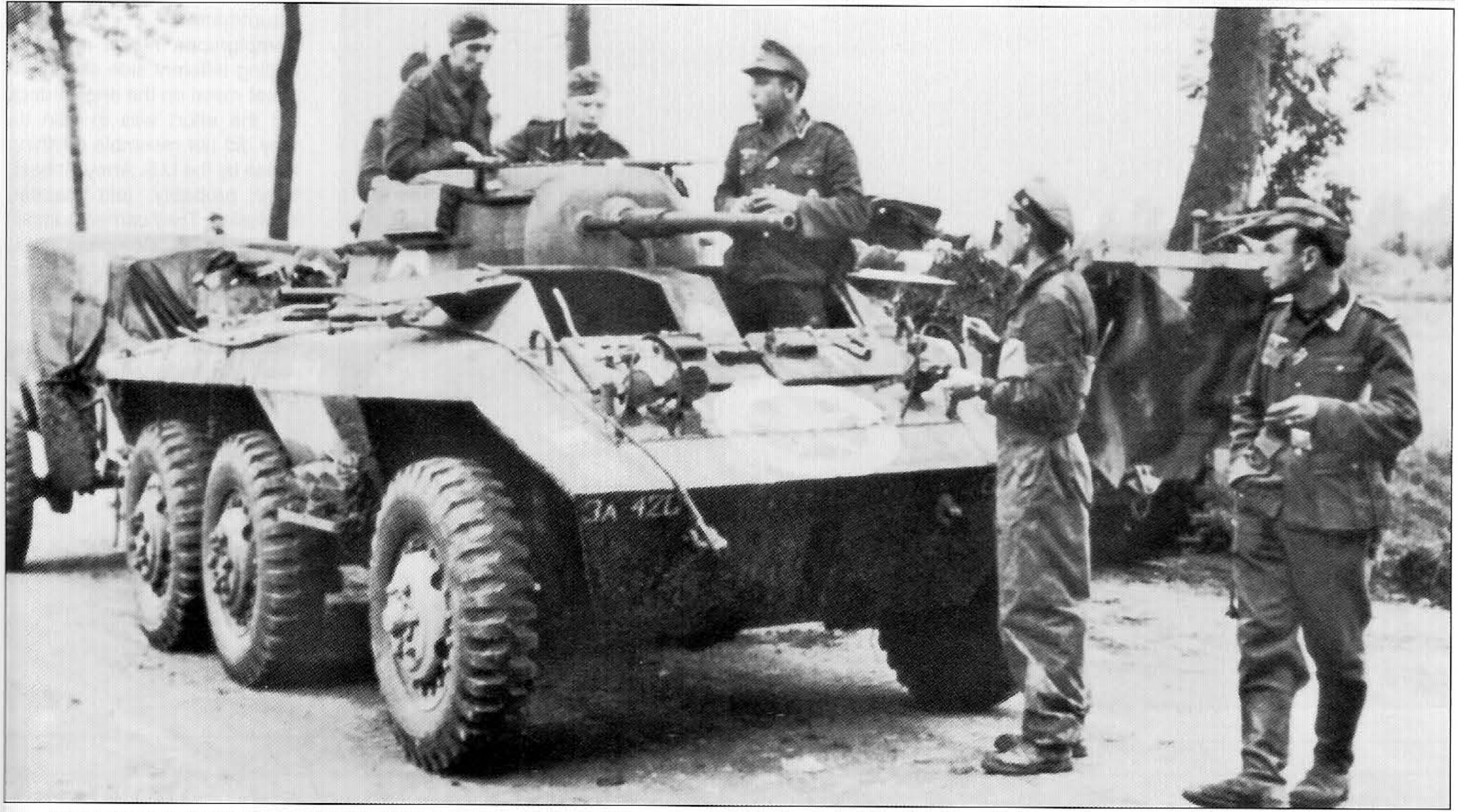
Another remnant of Kampfgruppe Peiper, Tiger II '312' from schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 abandoned near Goronne just west of Vielsalm. It was knocked out by tank destroyers of the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion that was attached to the 82nd Airborne Division.



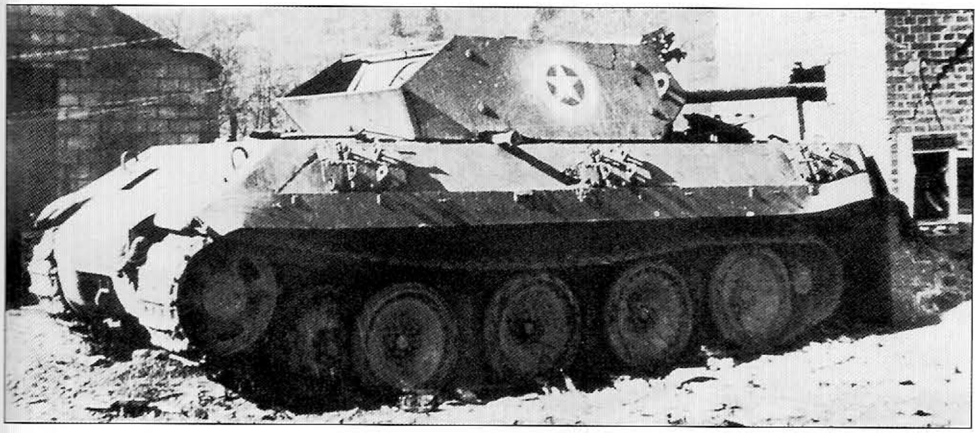
Tiger '008', the command vehicle from schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 first seen at Tondorf before the offensive, now lies in a field near the Antoine Farm. The gun in full recoil indicates that the crew sabotaged it by firing a round after the buffer fluid had been drained from the recoil cylinders. The identifying black 'G' painted on the glacis is clearly visible.



Tiger '213' survives to this day as a monument to the Ardennes Offensive in La Gleize. It was originally commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Rudolf Dollinger and was found abandoned on the Wérimont Farm. The end of the gun barrel was blown off and was subsequently replaced by a wooden one along with a muzzle brake from a knocked out Panther 'M10' from Panzerbrigade 150.

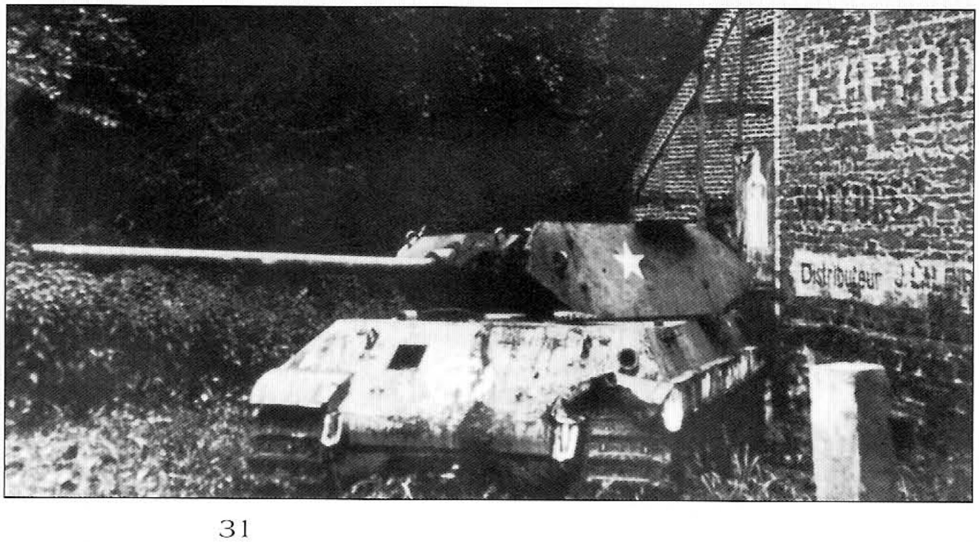


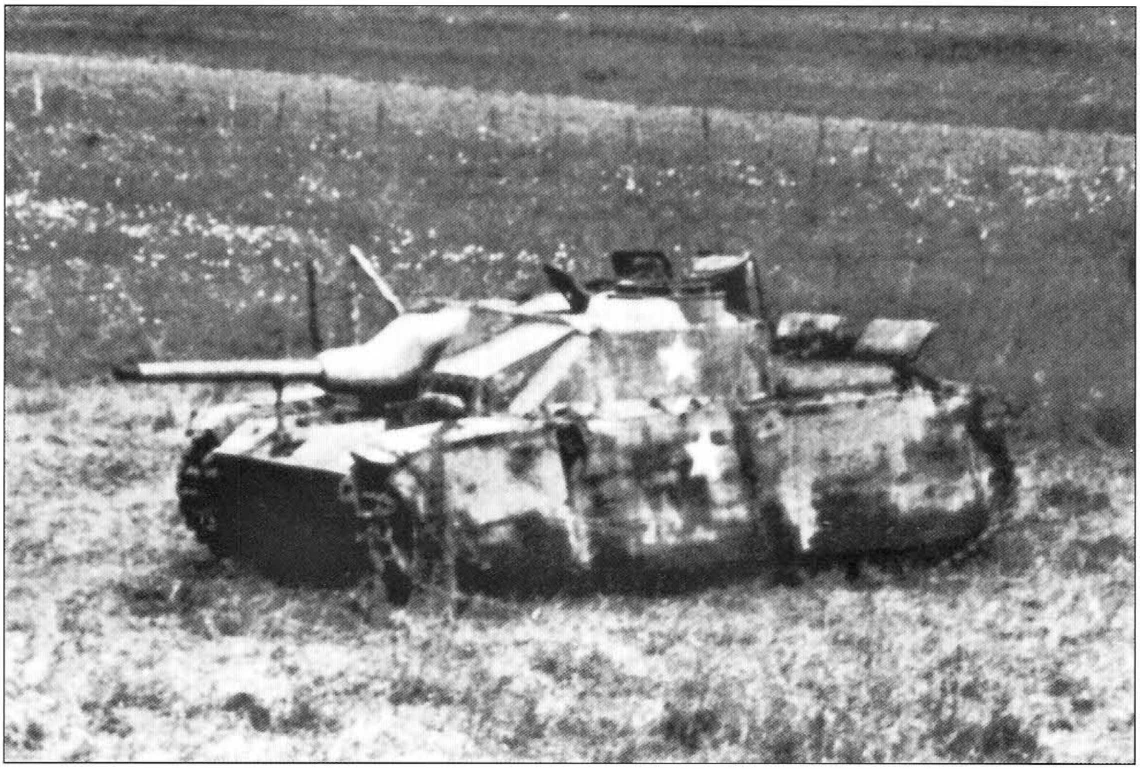
Under the codename 'Rabenhügel', Heeresgruppe B, G and H were ordered to furnish Allied tanks, vehicles and uniforms to Grafenwöhr for use by SS-Obersturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny's Panzerbrigade 150 during the Ardennes Offensive. M8 armored cars such as this one captured by 116.Panzer-Division in the late autumn of 1944, should have been turned over. Records show that Panzerbrigade 150 was equipped with a few American scout cars and armored cars although no photographic records appear to exist that any of them were M8's. The bumper code indicates this one was captured from the Third Army's 42nd Cavalry Squadron.



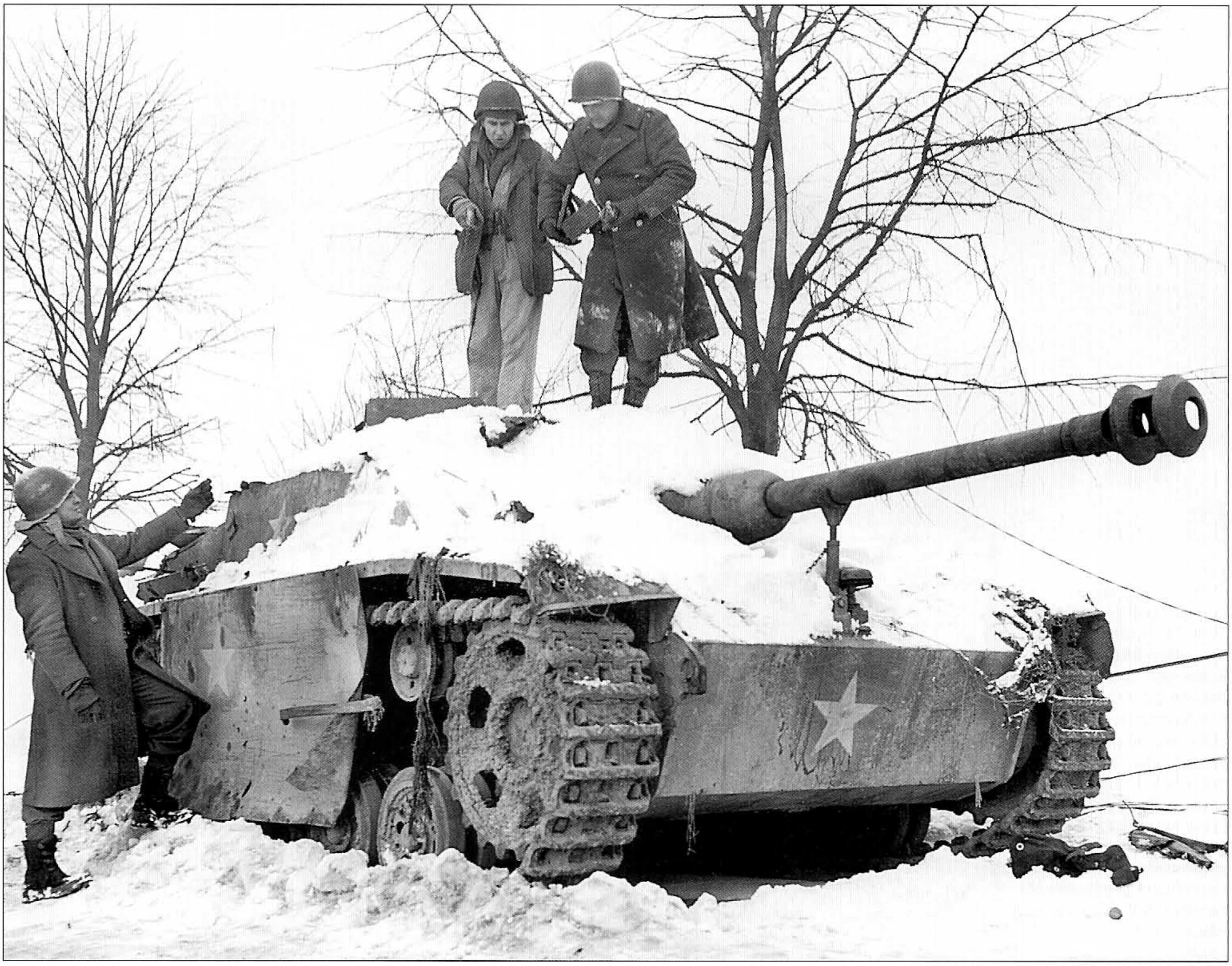
One of five Panther ersatz M10's from SS-Hauptsturmführer Adrian von Foelkersam's Kampfgruppe X of Panzerbrigade 150, this one was abandoned at La Falize on the evening 21 December after its commander was killed earlier in the afternoon. They were cleverly disguised by the addition of light sheet metal covers around the turret and hull, removal of the distinctive cupola and repainting complete with Allied markings. The Panthers carried bumper codes for B Company, 10th Tank Battalion, 5th Armored Division on the front and rear. This one was numbered B 10. They also carried an 'XY' in the middle to identify themselves to German traffic controllers. The muzzle brake on Tiger '213' at La Gleize was salvaged from this Panther.

After being delayed two days in the huge traffic jam around Losheim, Skorzeny realized that his plan of subterfuge would no longer work and suggested to Sepp Dietrich that his three units be combined and utilized as a normal fighting unit. Dietrich agreed and Panzerbrigade 150 was assigned the task of throwing the Americans out of Malmédy, which German intelligence had determined was lightly held. Unaware that the American positions had been reinforced, the attack commenced in the early morning of 21 December. Panther ersatz M10 number B 7 made it across the Warche River where it was disabled by an American artillery round. The crew was killed as they ran to safety back across the bridge.

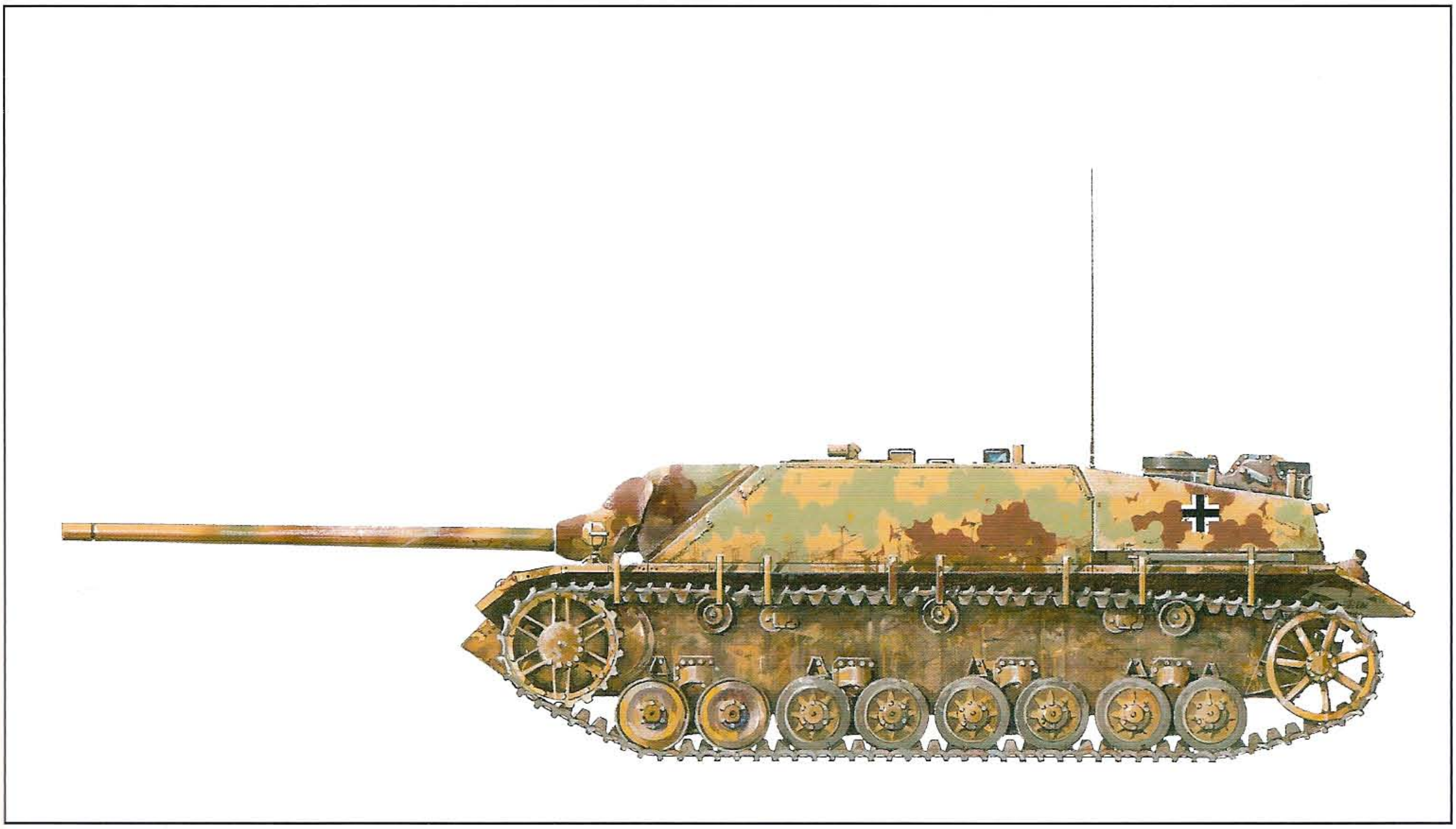




An attempt to disguise the five StuG.III Ausf.G of Hauptmann Scherff's Kampfgruppe Y was made by adding different side skirts and sheet metal on the engine deck but the effort was in vain as they did not resemble anything in use by the U.S. Army. At best, they probably just caused confusion. They carried bumper codes for C Company, 81st Tank Battalion, 5th Armored Division, which was not even in the Ardennes at the time. This one had the number C 5 and was abandoned between Baugnez and Géromont.

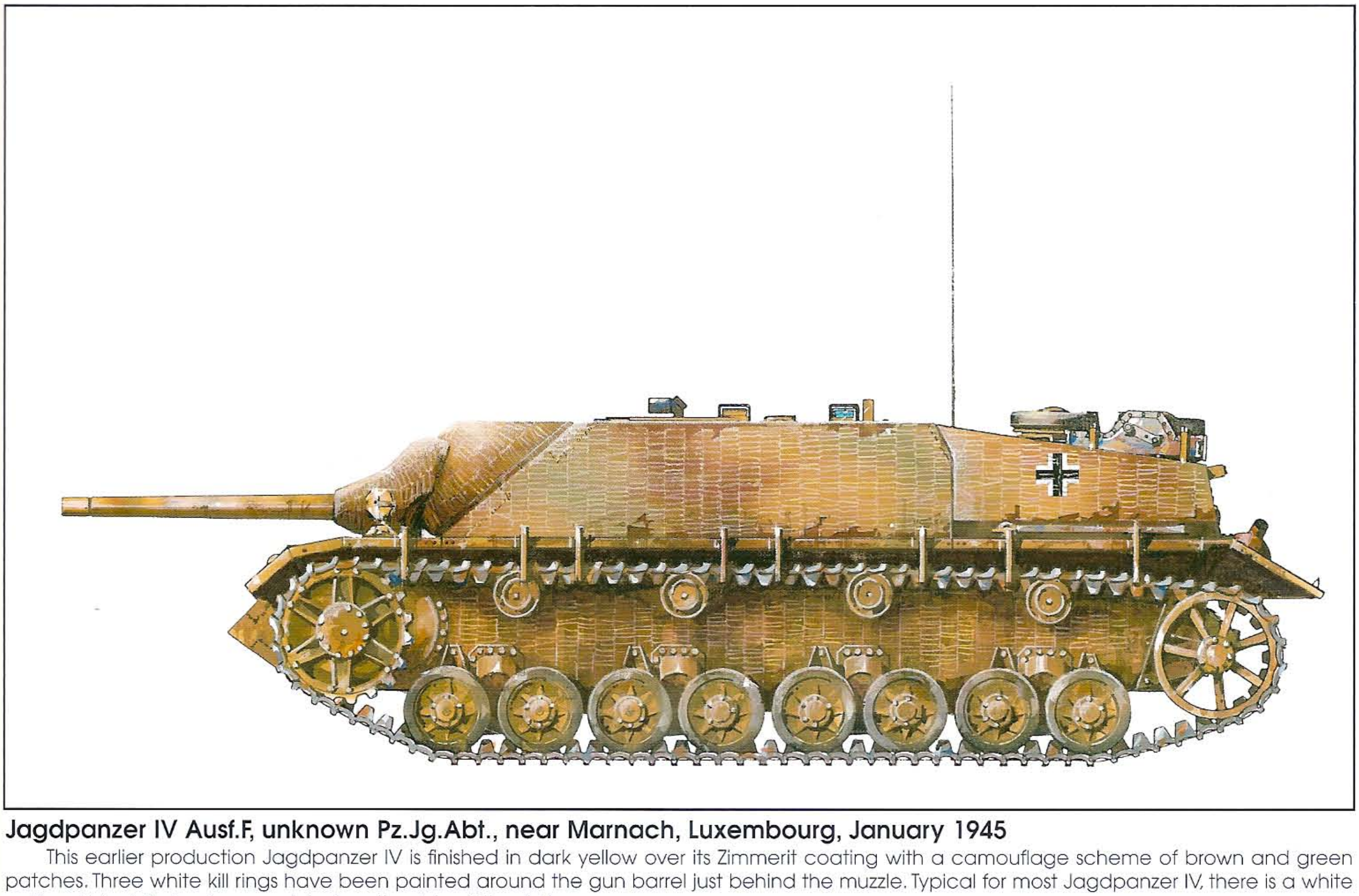


Another StuG.III Ausf.G from Kampfgruppe Y has a booby trap removed by men of the 291st Combat Engineers near Géromont on 15 January 1945.



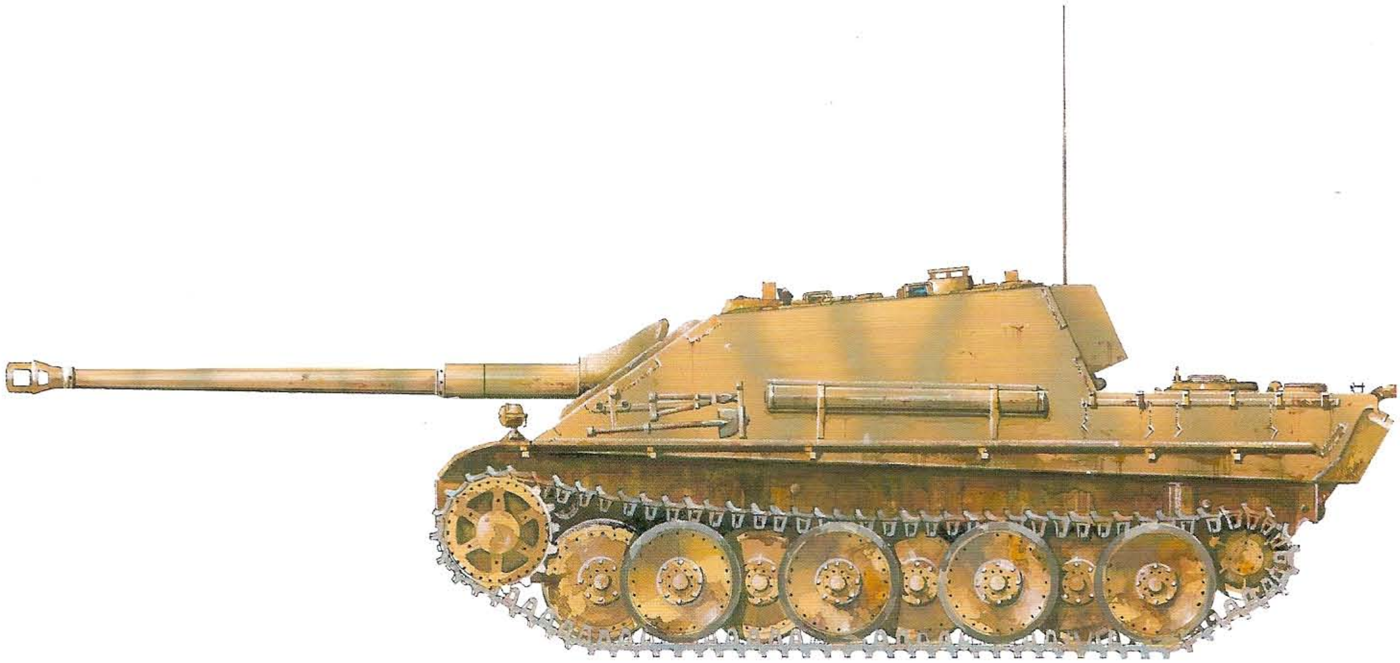
Panzer IV/70 (V), SS-Pz.Jg.Abt.1, 1.SS-Panzer-Division, Poteau, Belgium, December 1944

This late production Jagdpanzer IV is finished in overall dark yellow with a cloud pattern camouflage scheme of brown and green overlapping spots. The brown and green spots then have small irregular shaped patches of the dark yellow base color applied over them creating a dappled effect. Markings are limited to a white outlined black Balkenkreuz on the skirt armor beside the engine deck.



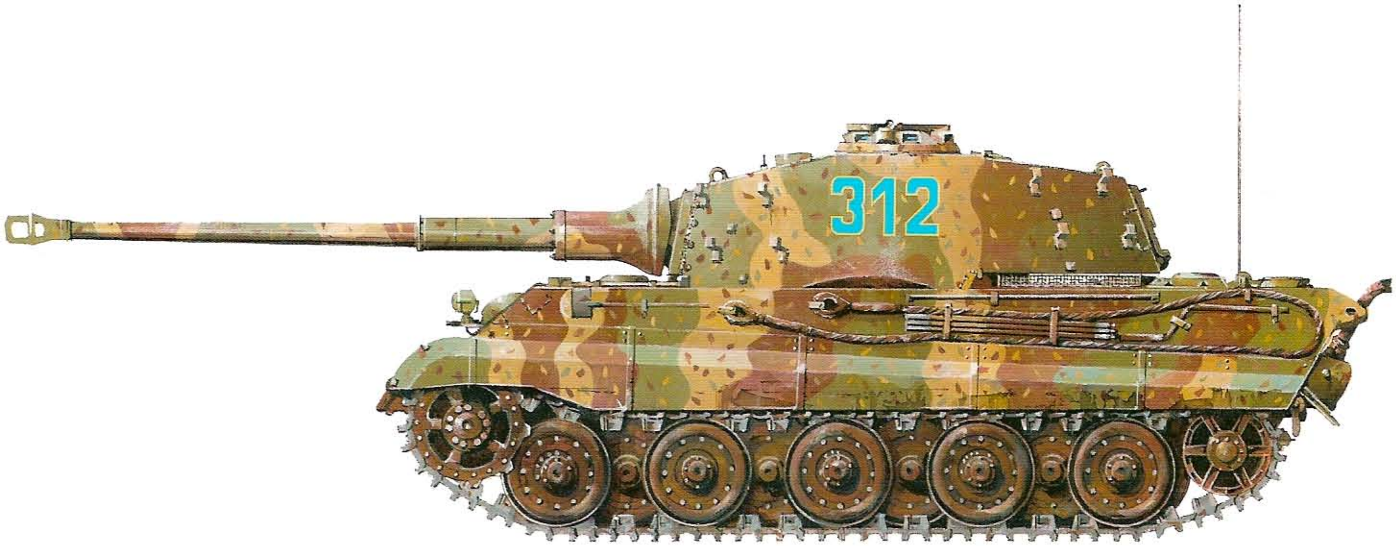
Jagdpanzer IV Ausf.F, unknown Pz.Jg.Abt., near Marnach, Luxembourg, January 1945

This earlier production Jagdpanzer IV is finished in dark yellow over its Zimmerit coating with a camouflage scheme of brown and green patches. Three white kill rings have been painted around the gun barrel just behind the muzzle. Typical for most Jagdpanzer IV, there is a white outlined black Balkenkreuz painted on the side of the skirt armor.



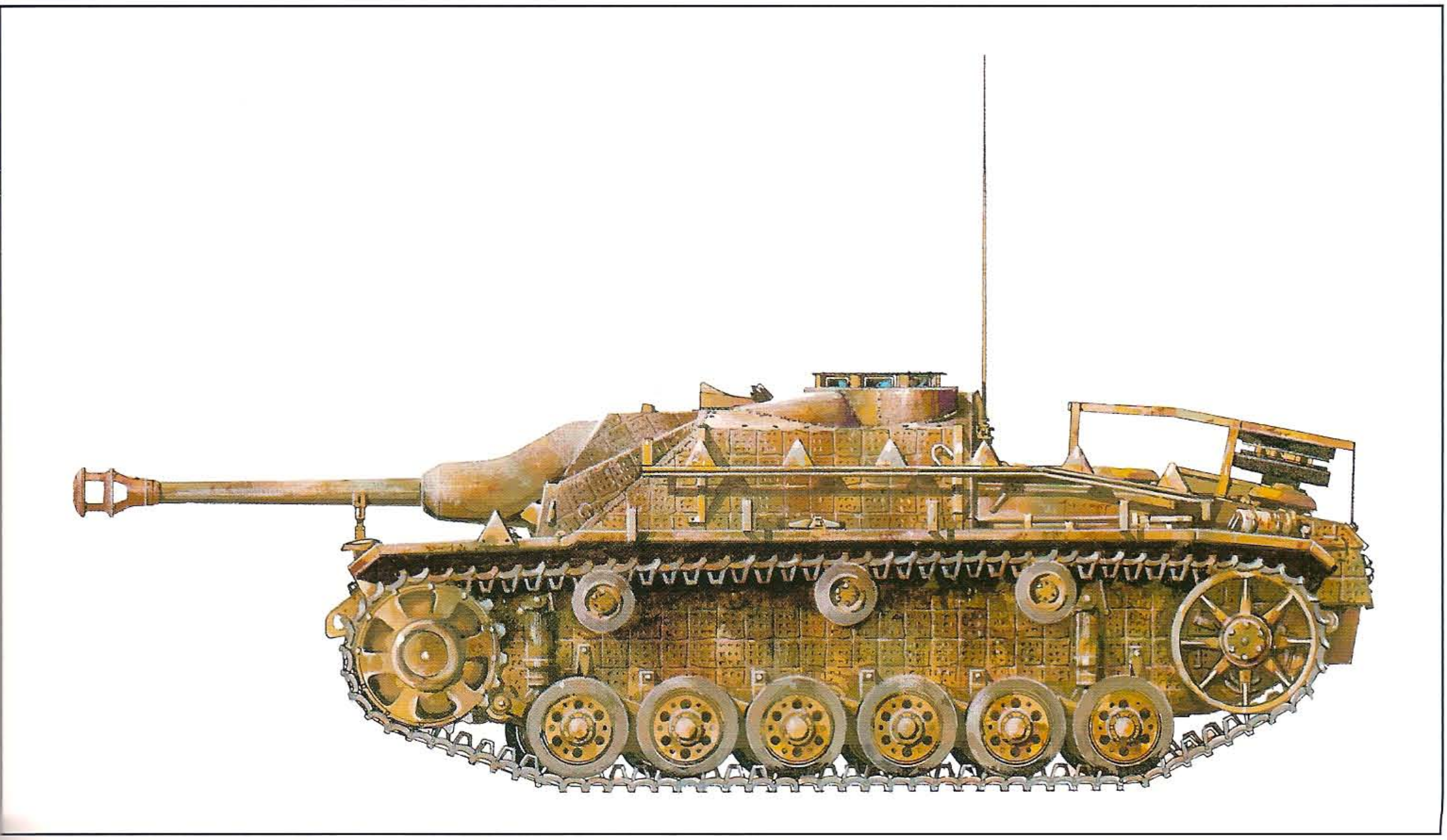
Jagdpanther, s.Pz.Jg.Abt.559, near Han-sur-Lesse, Belgium, December 1944

This is a late September 1944 production vehicle still with the early mantlet but without Zimmerit and is finished in overall red oxide primer with a camouflage scheme of dark yellow and green irregular lines. There are no visible markings.



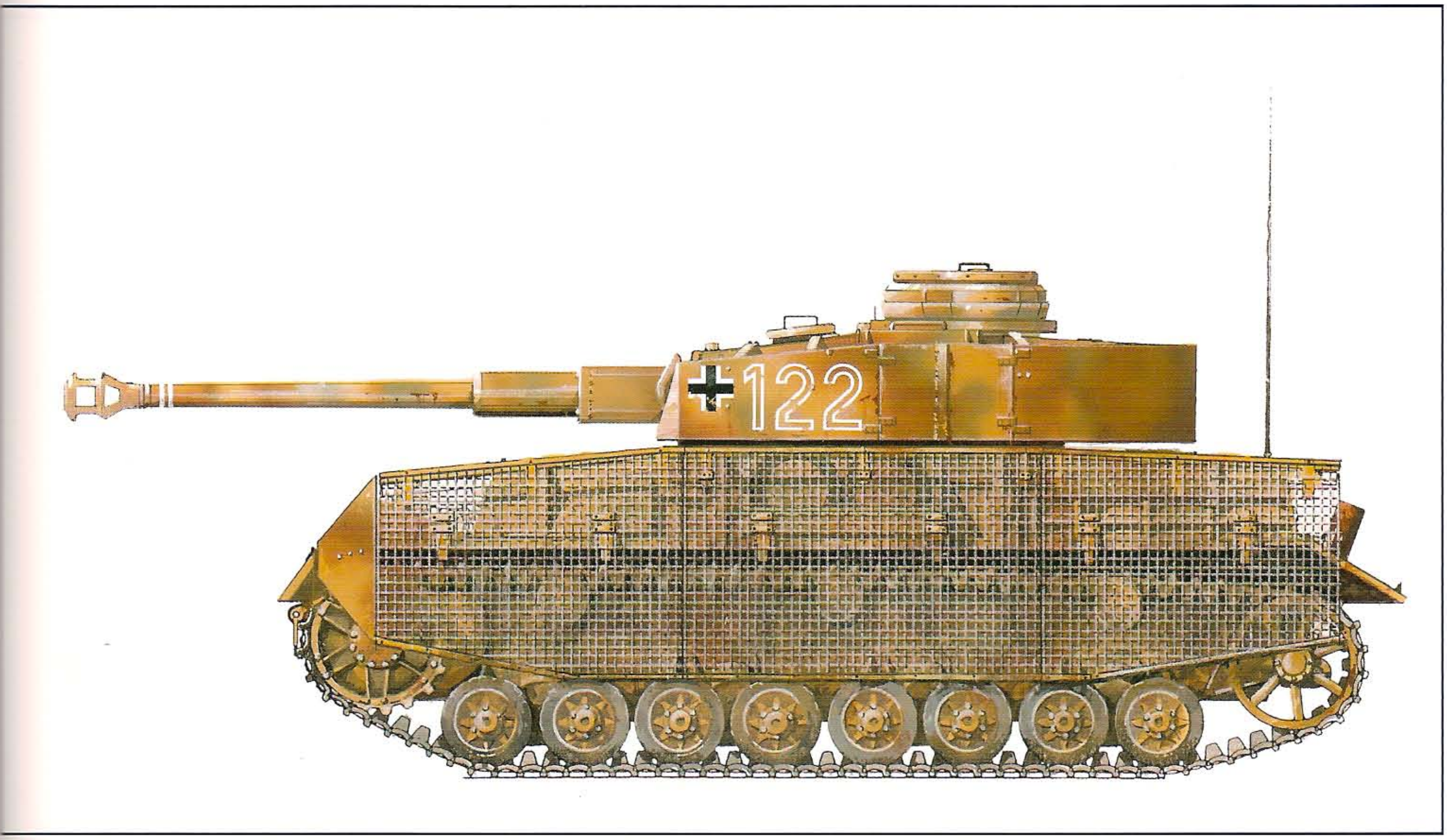
Pz.Kpfw. Tiger Ausf.B, 3./s.SS-Pz.Abt.501, Goronne, Belgium, December 1944

This Tiger II is finished with a factory applied hard edge camouflage scheme of green and dark yellow over the red primer base. Small spots of the other two colors have been added over each of the base colors to complete the 'ambush' pattern. The tactical number for 3.Kompanie vehicles was painted in light blue with a yellow outline and they did not carry the Balkenkreuz.



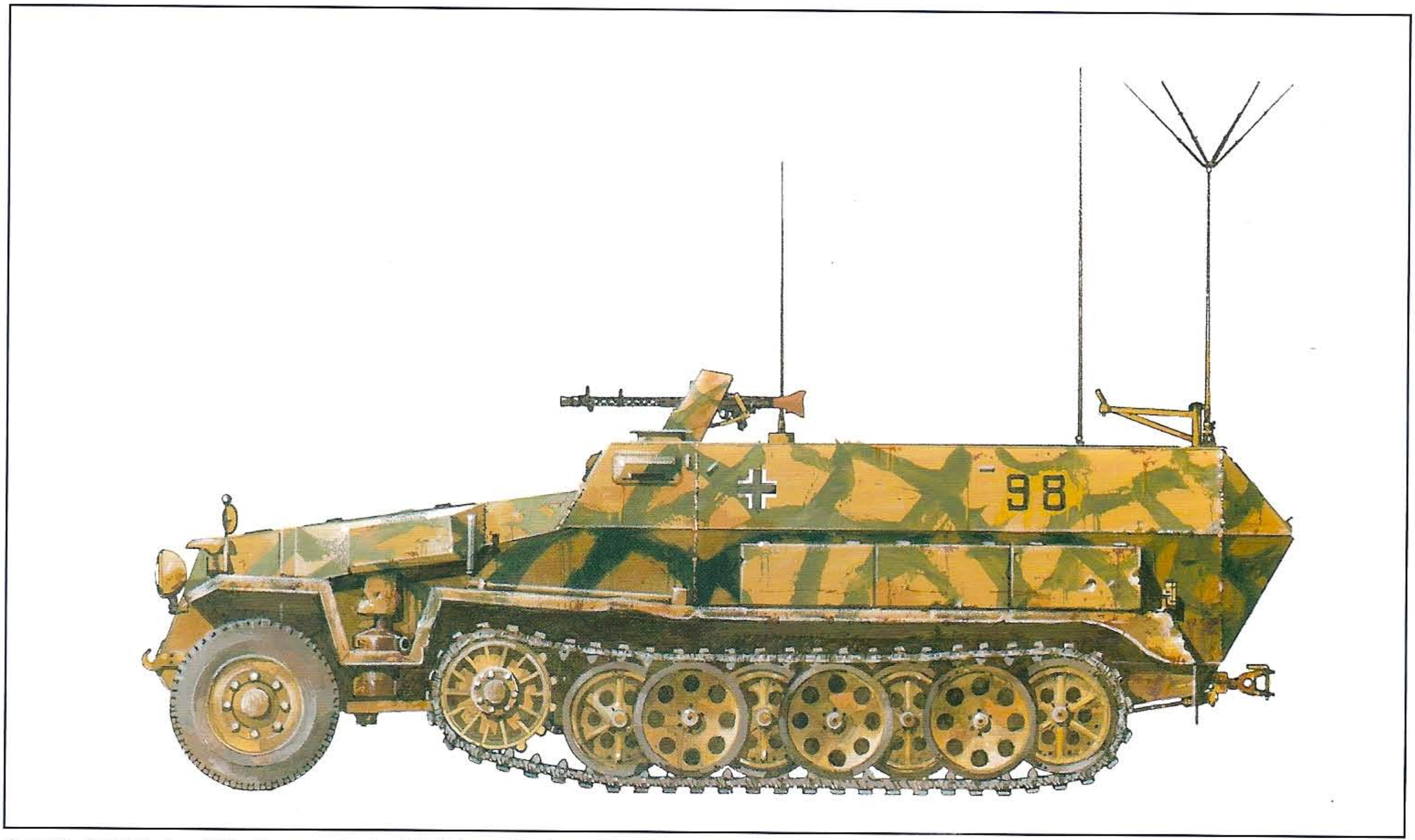
StuG.III Ausf.G, Pz.Abt.115, 15.Panzer-Grenadier-Division, near Champs, Belgium, December 1944

This StuG.III Ausf.G produced on the chassis of a Pz.Kpfw.III, is finished in overall dark yellow with a standard camouflage scheme of brown and green patches. 15.Panzer-Grenadier-Division was equipped with 30 StuG.III in its 2. and 3.Kompanie at the start of the battle. It is likely that they would have carried a white outlined black Balkenkreuz and three digit tactical number on their Schürzen.



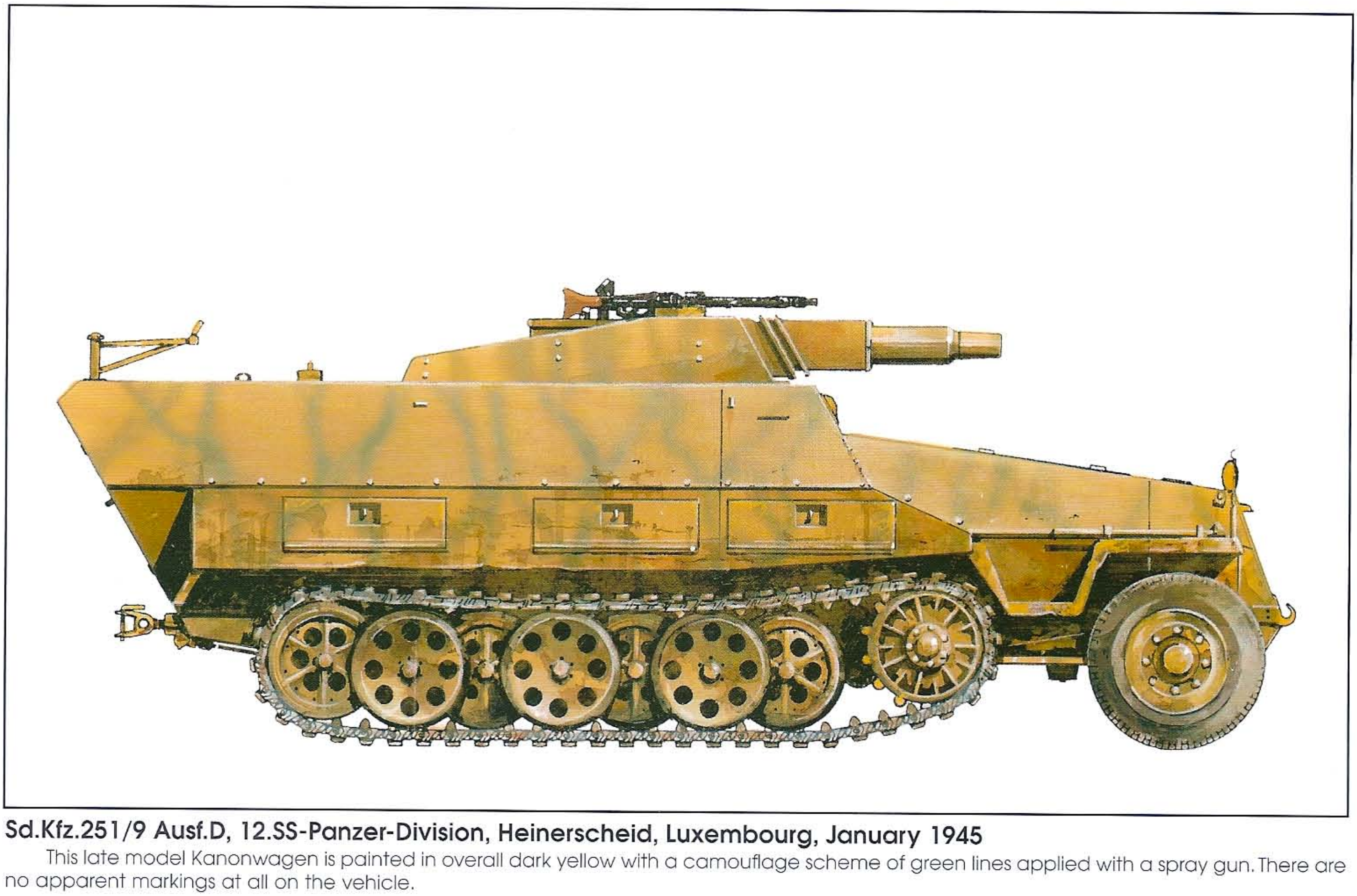
Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J, Pz.Abt.115, 15.Panzer-Grenadier-Division, Langlir, Belgium, December 1944

This late 1944 production Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J is fitted with the wire mesh Schürzen introduced in September and swivel hatch on the commander's cupola introduced in October, but still retains the earlier tow brackets. It is painted in red primer with a camouflage scheme of dark yellow and green patches with hard edges. The tactical number '122' is painted in white outline on the turret skirt armor along with a white outlined black Balkenkreuz. Two white kill rings have been painted on the end of the gun barrel behind the muzzle brake.



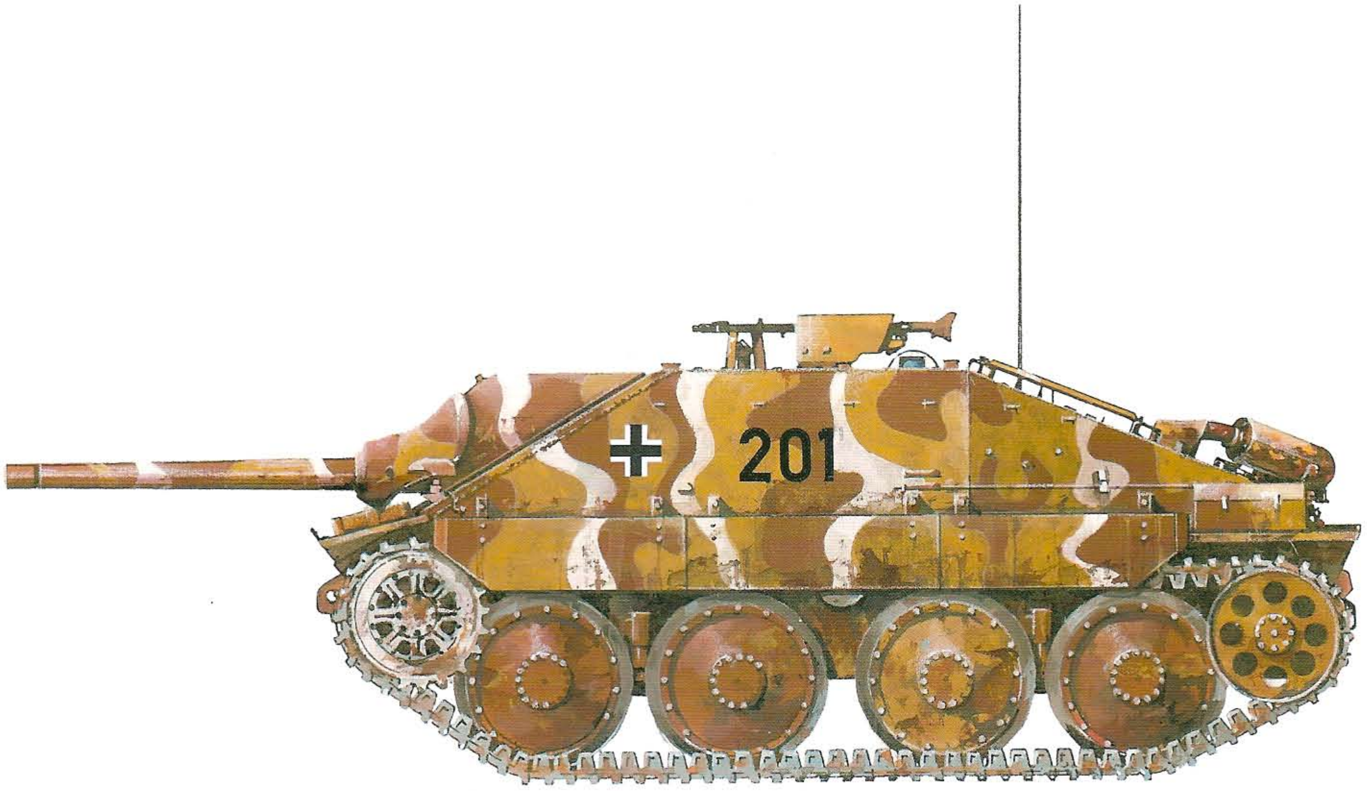
Sd.Kfz.251/6 Ausf.C, Panzer-Lehr-Division, Jodenville, Belgium, December 1944

This early model command half-track is finished in overall dark yellow with hand painted stripes, likely in green, for camouflage. There is a two digit tactical number, '98', probably in black, painted on the side along with a white outlined black Balkenkreuz above the front stowage bin. A Balkenkreuz was also painted centrally on the upper half of the rear access doors.



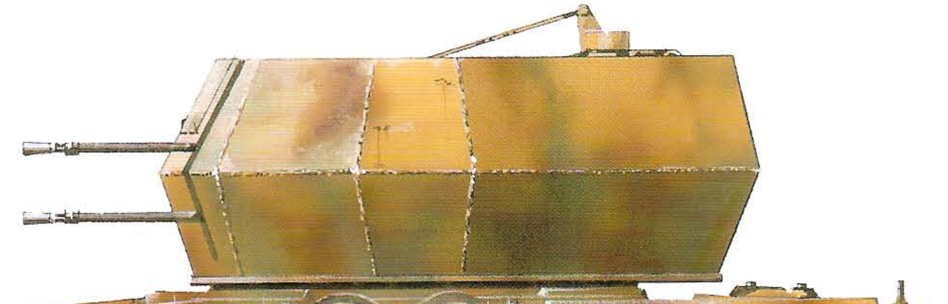
Sd.Kfz.251/9 Ausf.D, 12.SS-Panzer-Division, Heinerscheid, Luxembourg, January 1945

This late model Kanonwagen is painted in overall dark yellow with a camouflage scheme of green lines applied with a spray gun. There are no apparent markings at all on the vehicle.



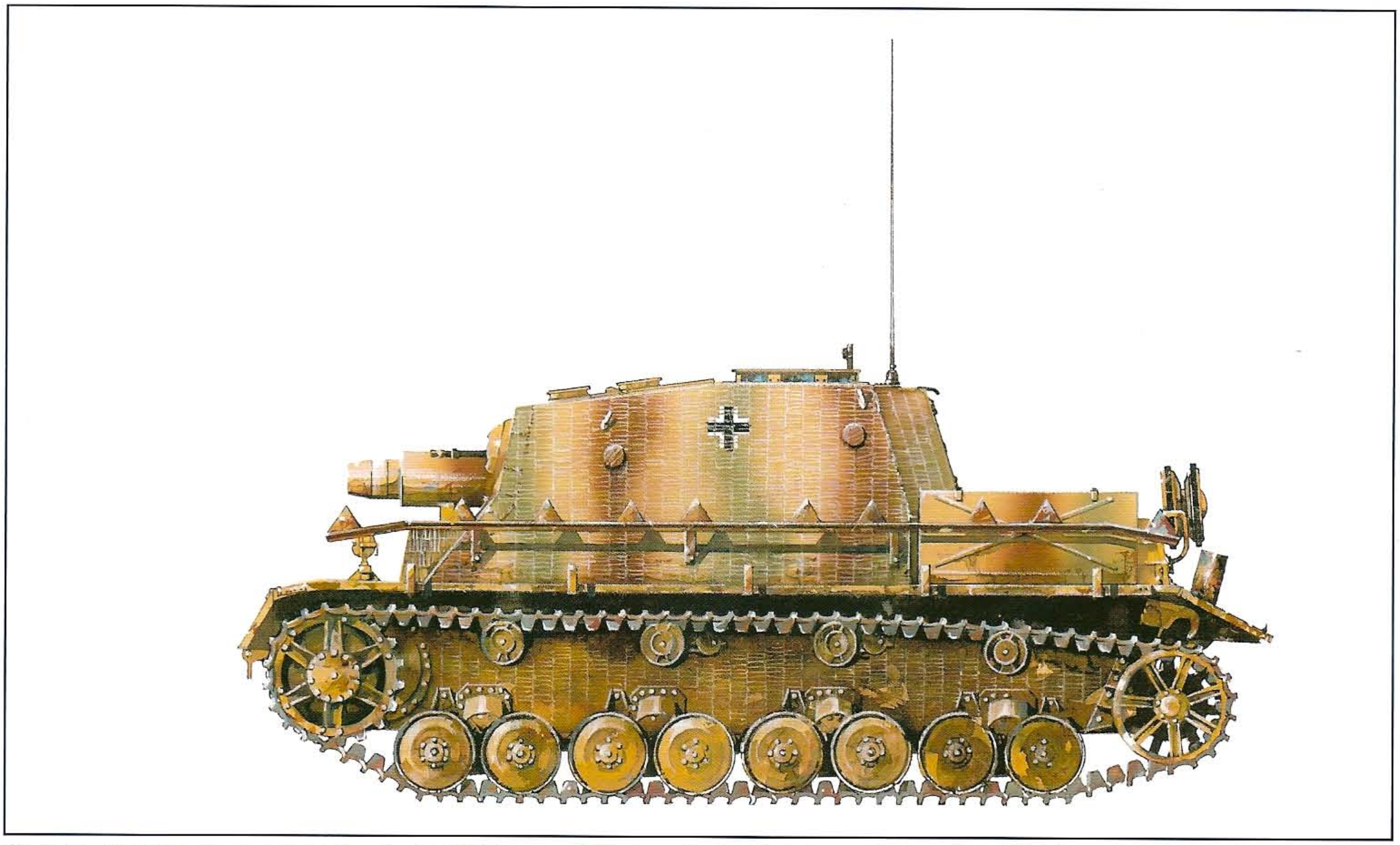
Jagdpanzer 38 'Hetzer', 167.Volks-Grenadier-Division, near Doncols, Luxembourg, December 1944

This 'Hetzer' tank destroyer is painted in a factory applied base coat of red primer with a thinned hard-edged pattern of stripes and patches of dark yellow and white. The tactical number '201' is painted in black on the side of the hull along with a white outlined black Balkenkreuz.



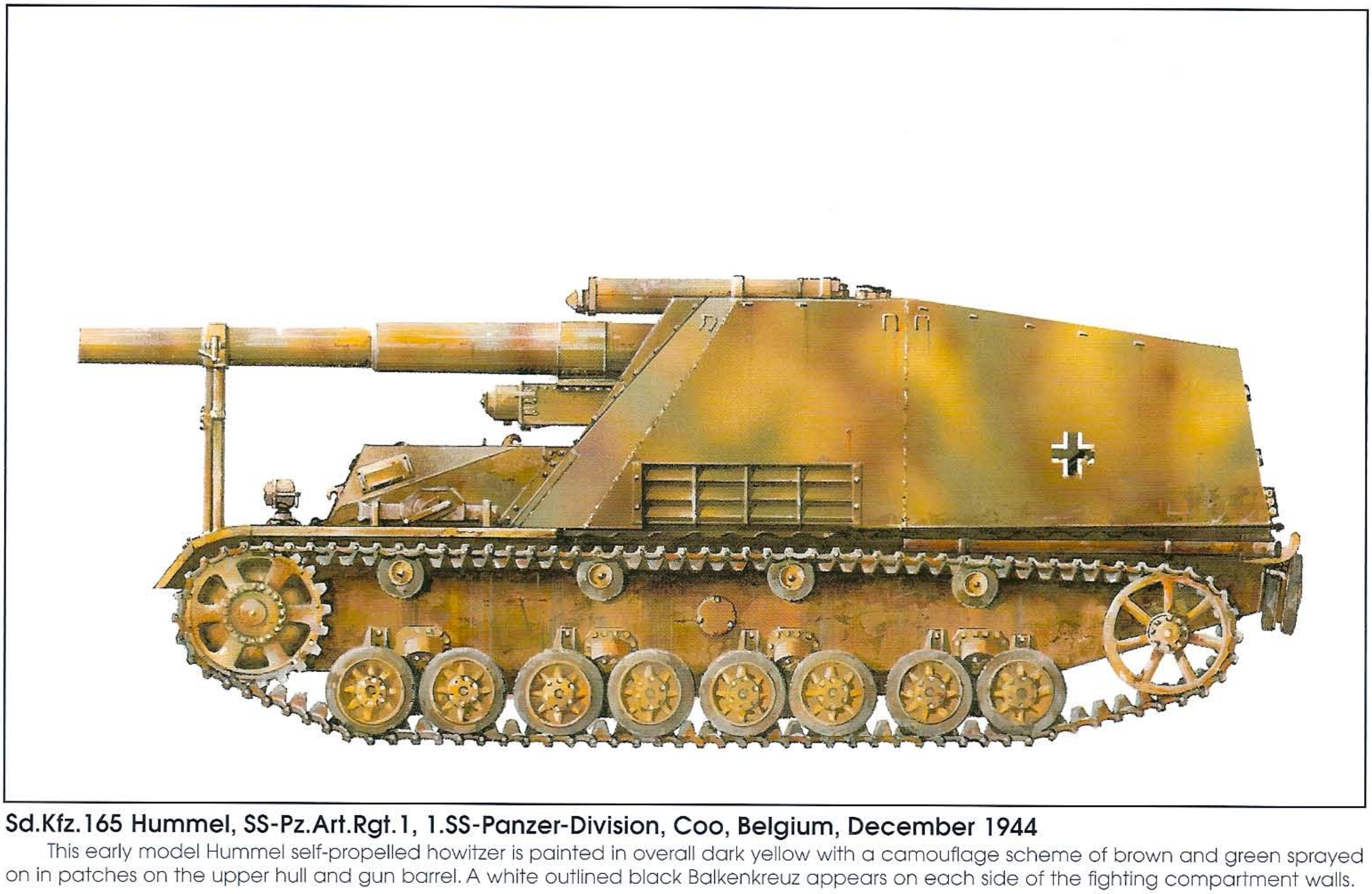
Flakpanzer IV Wirbelwind, SS-Pz.Rgt.1, 1.SS-Panzer-Division, Stoumont, Belgium, December 1944

One of four Wirbelwind available to 1.SS-Panzer-Division for the Ardennes Offensive, this one is built on the chassis of a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H and is painted in overall dark yellow with a camouflage scheme of brown and green patches applied on the upper hull and turret. They usually carried a white outlined black Balkenkreuz painted on the forward sides of the upper hull.



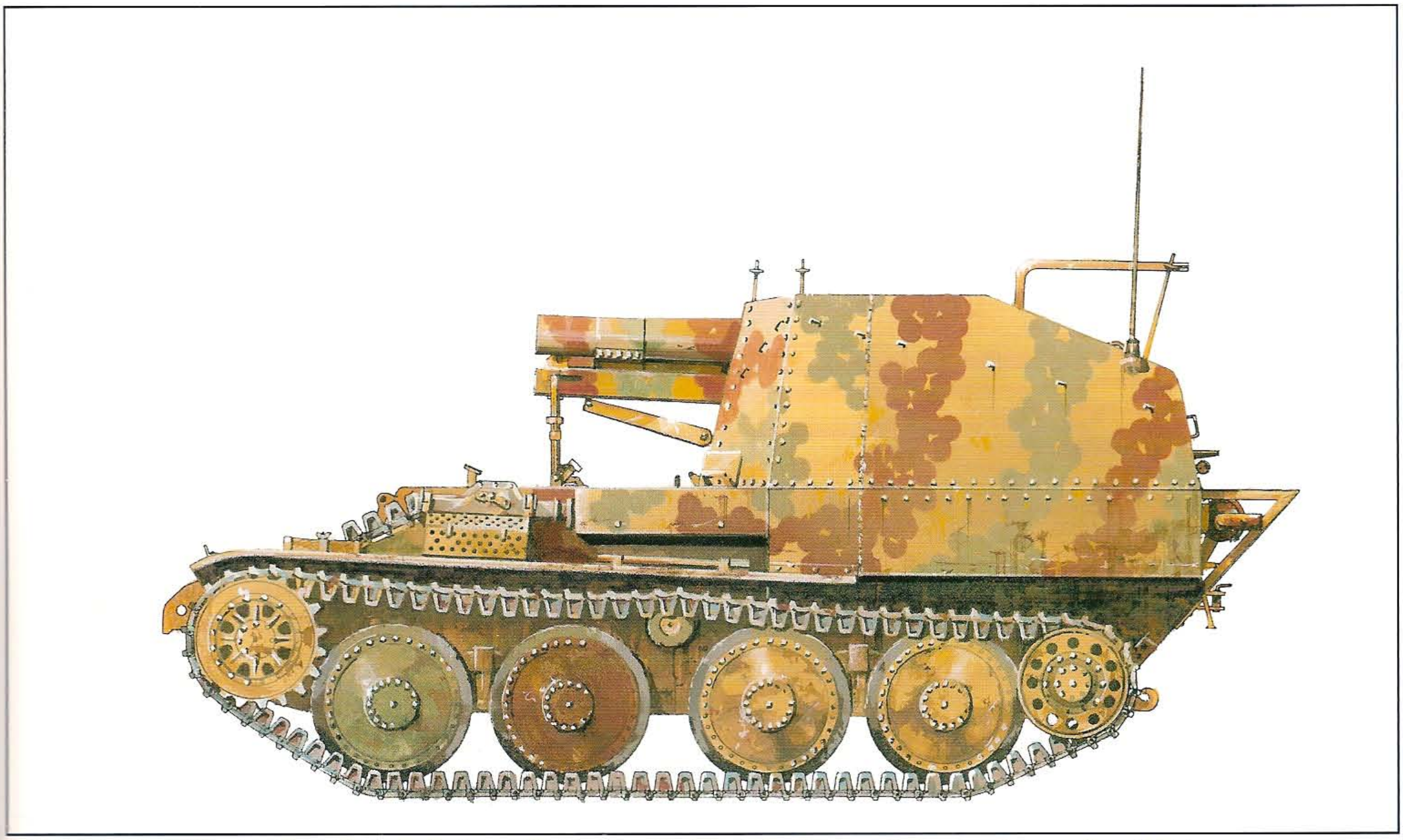
Sturmpanzer IV Brummbär, Stu.Pz.Abt.217, near Möderscheid, Belgium, December 1944

This late model Brummbär was finished in overall dark yellow with a sprayed camouflage pattern of brown and green patches over the Zimmerit coating. A white outlined black Balkenkreuz was painted high on each side of the fighting compartment and on the armored plate in front of the driver.



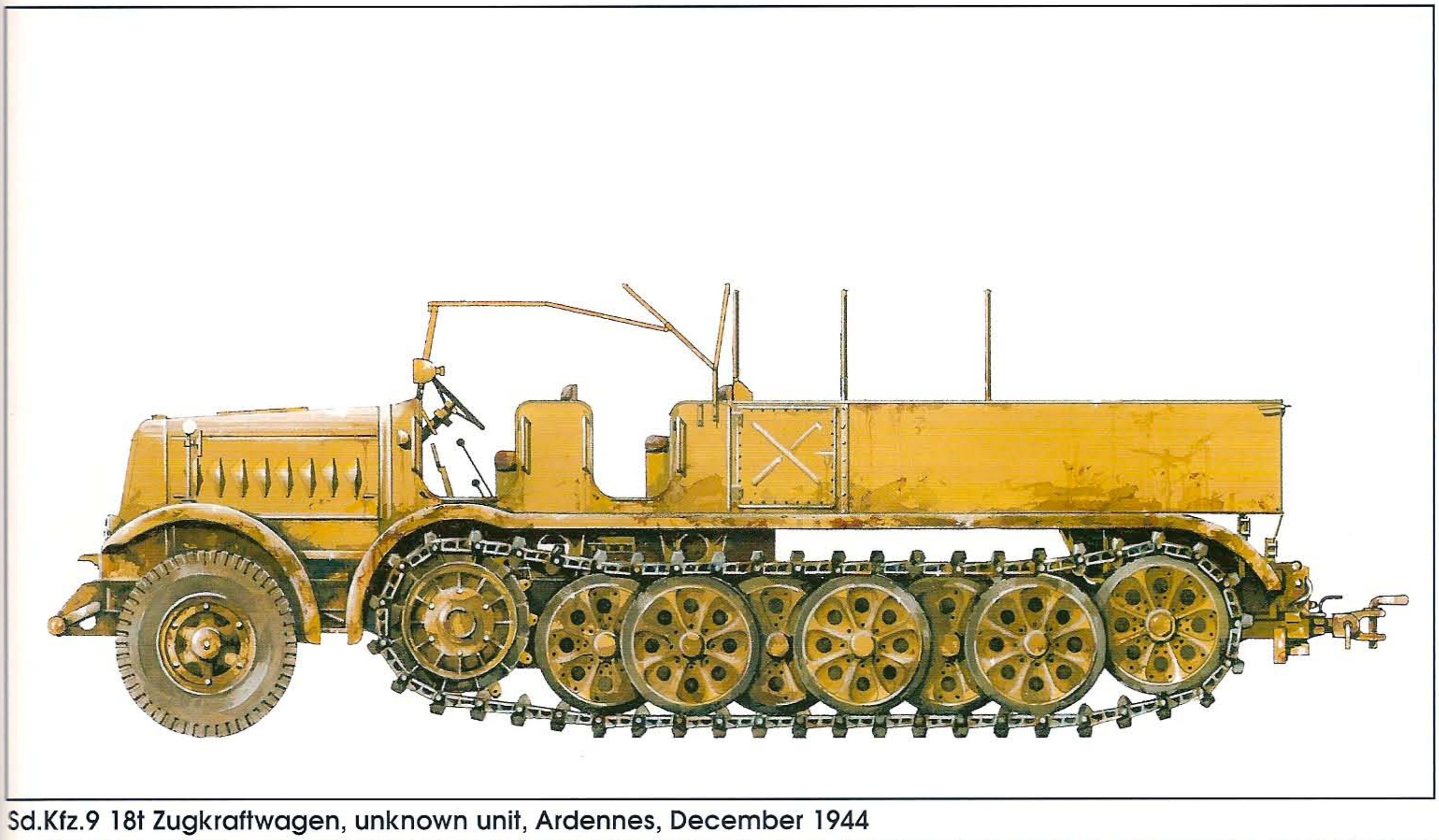
Sd.Kfz.165 Hummel, SS-Pz.Art.Rgt.1, 1.SS-Panzer-Division, Coo, Belgium, December 1944

This early model Hummel self-propelled howitzer is painted in overall dark yellow with a camouflage scheme of brown and green sprayed on in patches on the upper hull and gun barrel. A white outlined black Balkenkreuz appears on each side of the fighting compartment walls.



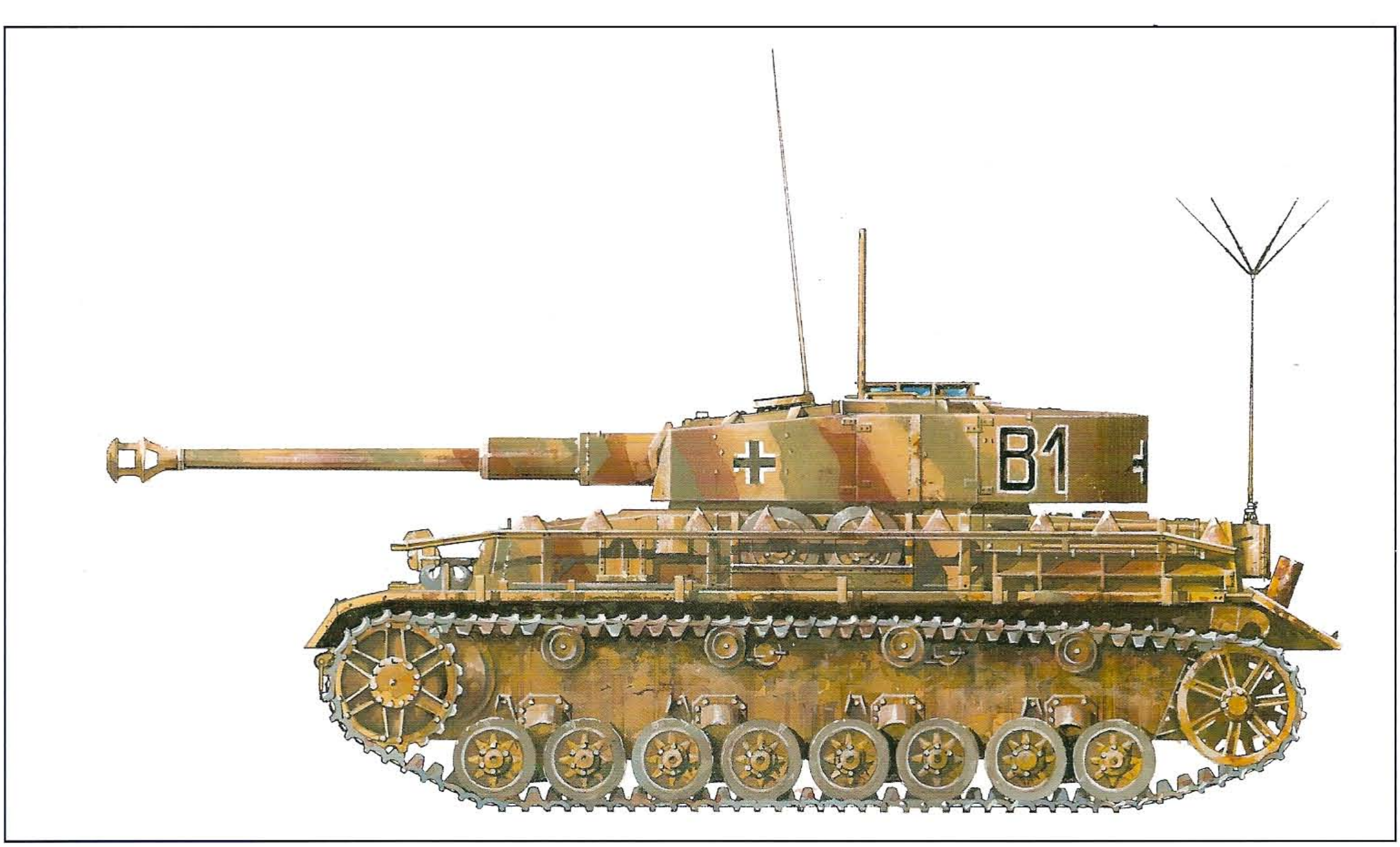
Sd.Kfz.138/1 Grille Ausf.M, SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt.2, 1.SS-Panzer-Division, La Gleize, Belgium, December 1944

The official name for this vehicle is 15cm Schweres Infanteriegeschütz 33/1 auf Selbstfahrlafette 38(t) Ausf.M. Six of them were found abandoned in La Gleize after Kampfgruppe Peiper retired from the town on 24 December. They were painted with a hard edge camouflage pattern of green and brown interconnected spots on the dark yellow base.



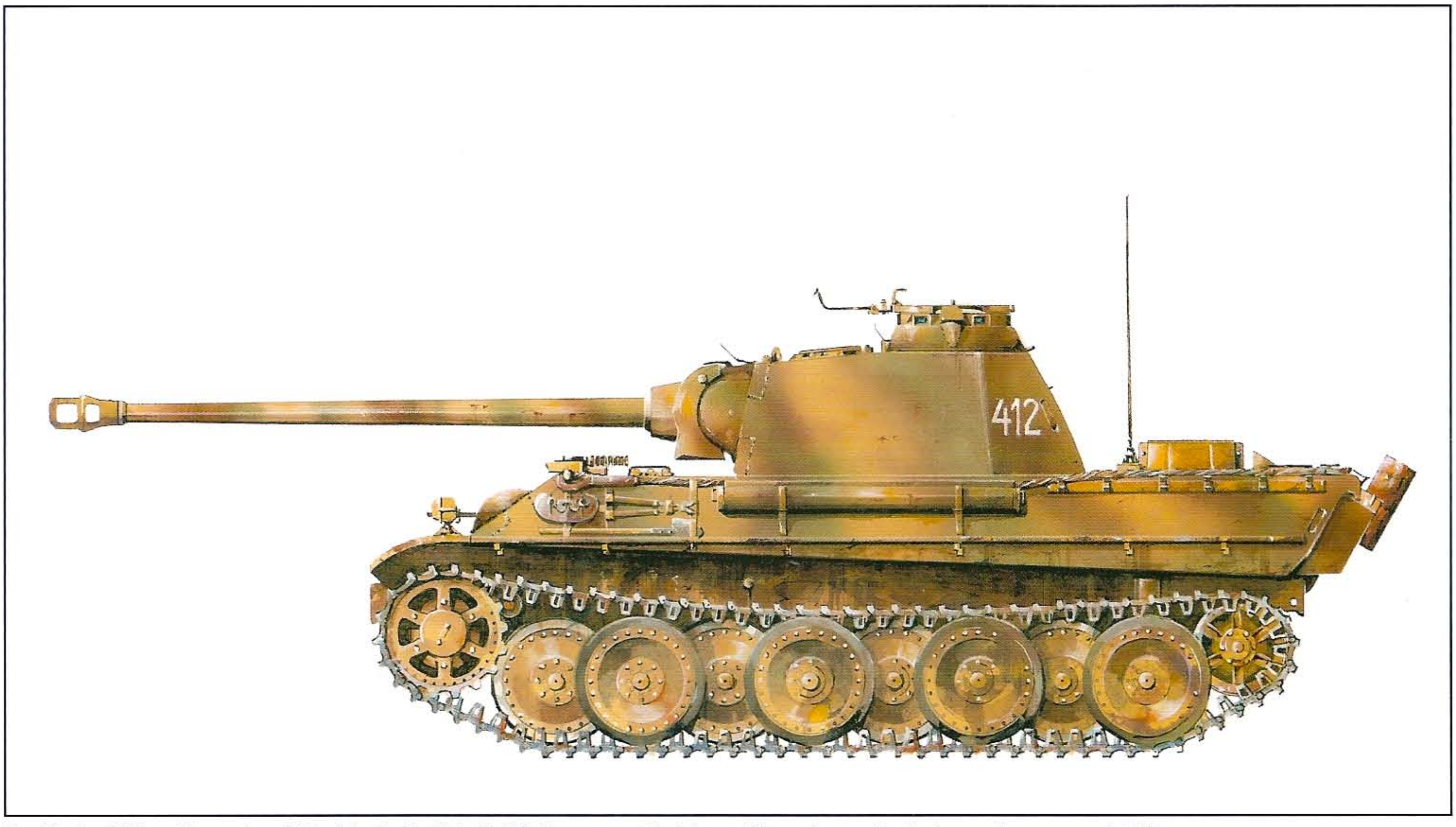
Sd.Kfz.9 18t Zugkraftwagen, unknown unit, Ardennes, December 1944

This Famo 18-tonne half-track prime mover is of the very late type with a simplified front mudguard that is separated from the rear track guard. It also features the late style pressed metal sidewalls on the cargo compartment formed without the diagonal stiffening ribs commonly seen on the earlier models. The finish is overall dark yellow with a light coating mud on the lower body, roadwheels and tracks. There are no visible markings although it is likely that it would have carried the standard Wehrmacht license plates on the front and rear.



Pz.Beob.Wg.IV Ausf.J, SS-Pz.Art.Rgt.12, 12.SS-Panzer-Division, Weiswampach, Luxembourg, December 1944

This is a rare Panzerbeobachtungswagen IV fitted with a Sturmgeschütz III cupola in place of the standard Pz.Kpfw.IV cupola. A star antenna for the FuG8 radio set was fitted to a mount protected by an armored housing on the upper right side of the rear hull and the antenna for the FuG4 was relocated to the right side of the turret roof. A TSF 1 rotating periscope was fitted to the left side of turret roof as well. It is painted in red primer with a camouflage scheme of dark yellow and green patches.

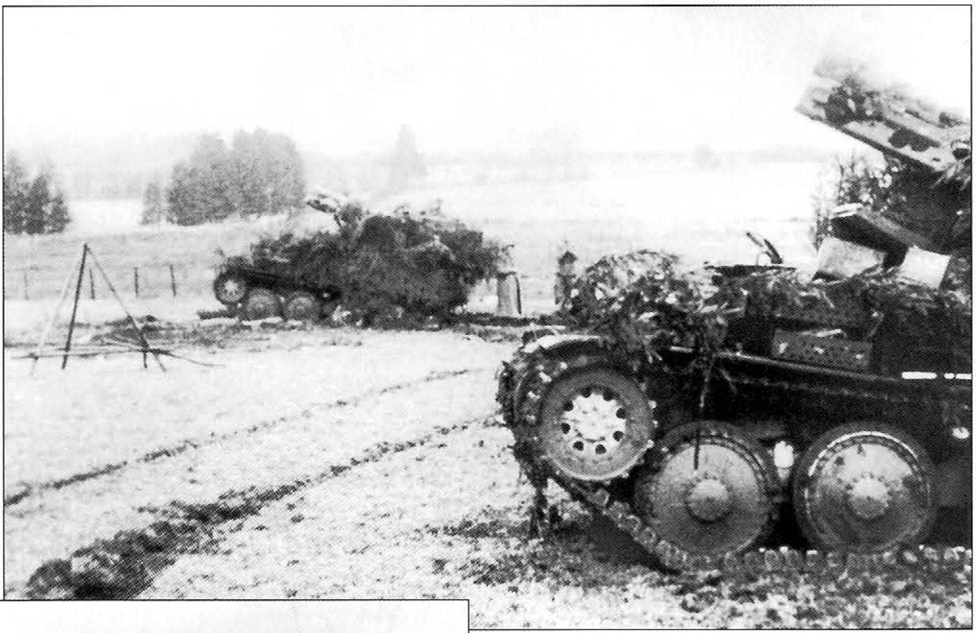


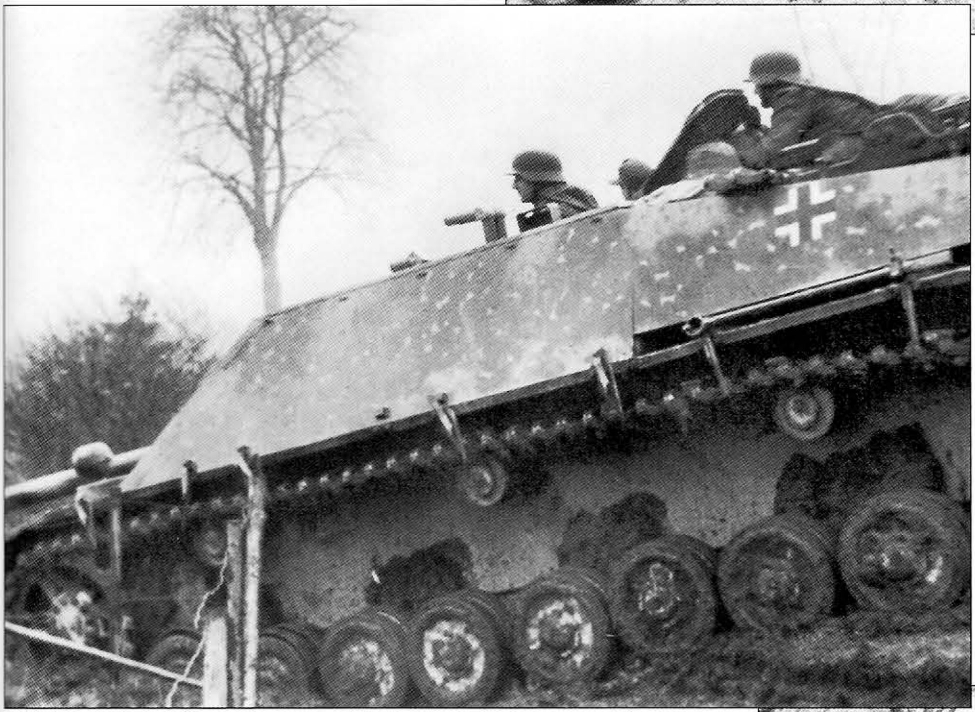
Pz.Kpfw.V Panther Ausf.G, SS-Pz.Rgt.9, 9.SS-Panzer-Division, Sterpigny, Belgium, January 1945

This is a late model Panther fitted with the chin mantlet introduced in September and raised fan cover for the crew compartment heater introduced in October 1944. It is painted in red primer with a factory applied camouflage scheme of dark yellow and green sprayed over. The three digit tactical number '412' is painted in white on the rear side of the turret. No other markings were evident.

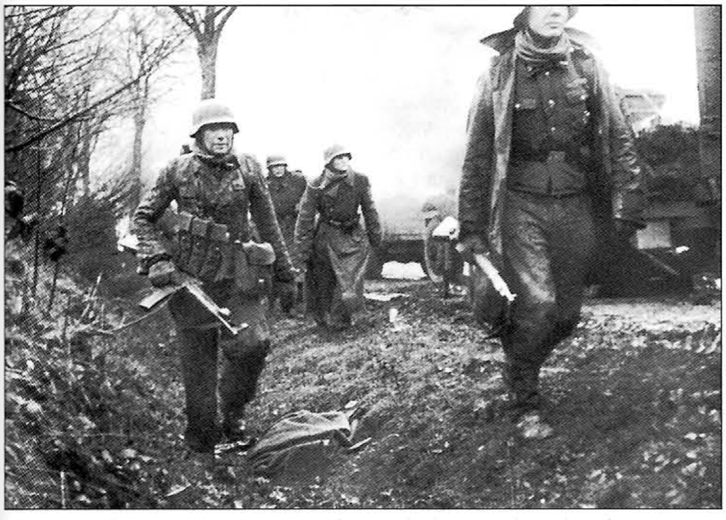
Poteau

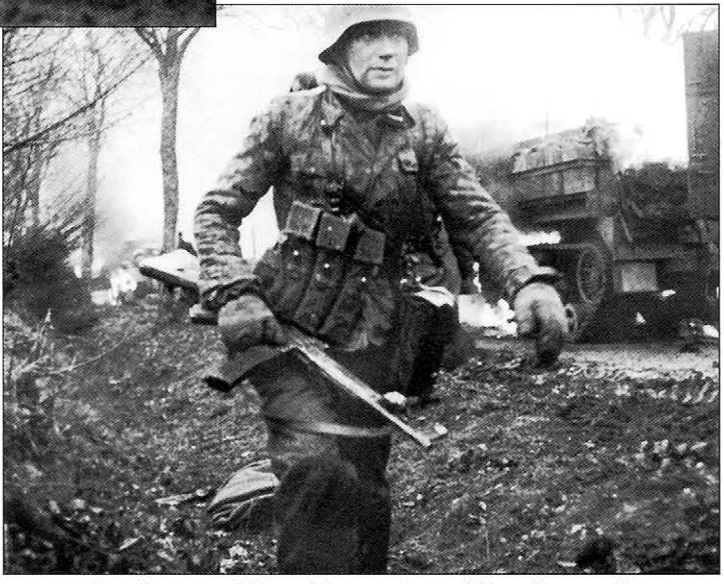
Two heavily camouflaged Sd.Kfz.138/1 Grille Ausf.M self-propelled guns from 13.(IG)Kompanie SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, attached to Kampfgruppe Hansen, sit in a field west of Kaiserbaracke, near Recht, on 18 December. The target was Poteau, four kilometers away.



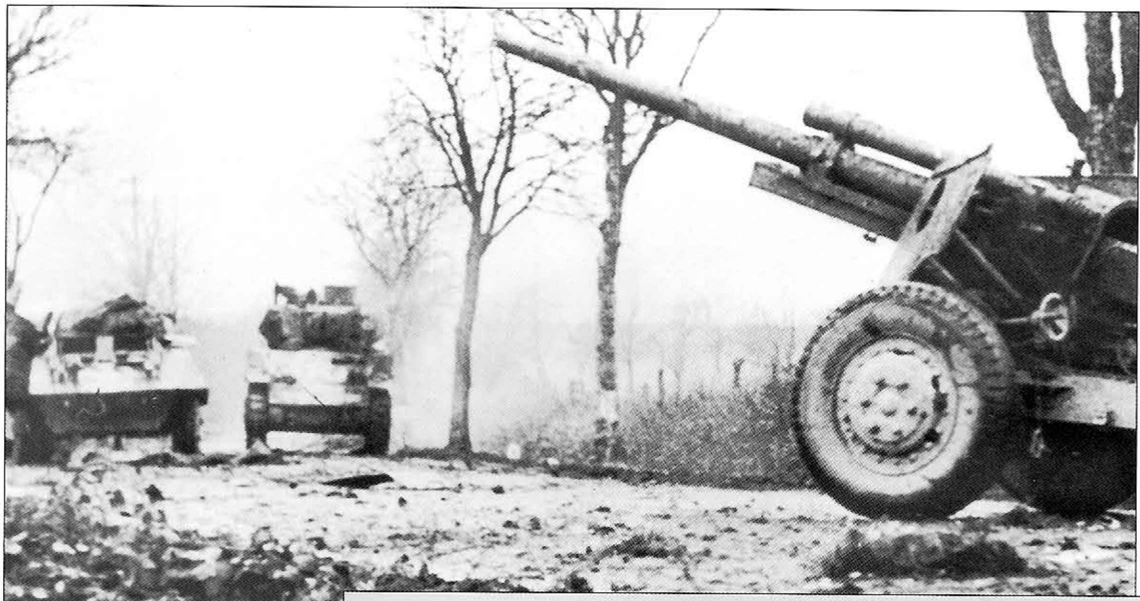


A Jagdpanzer IV/70 (V) from SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 moves off the road and into an adjacent field to bypass the wrecked armored cars, half-tracks and light tanks from the 18th Cavalry Squadron, 14th Cavalry Group that was ambushed by Kampfgruppe Hansen during their attack towards Poteau from Recht. The lack of Zimmerit indicates that this vehicle was produced after mid-September 1944 although a cine film shows it was still fitted with the earlier horizontal cylindrical exhaust muffler that was ordered to be replaced by the vertical Flammentöter flame suppressing exhaust in August.



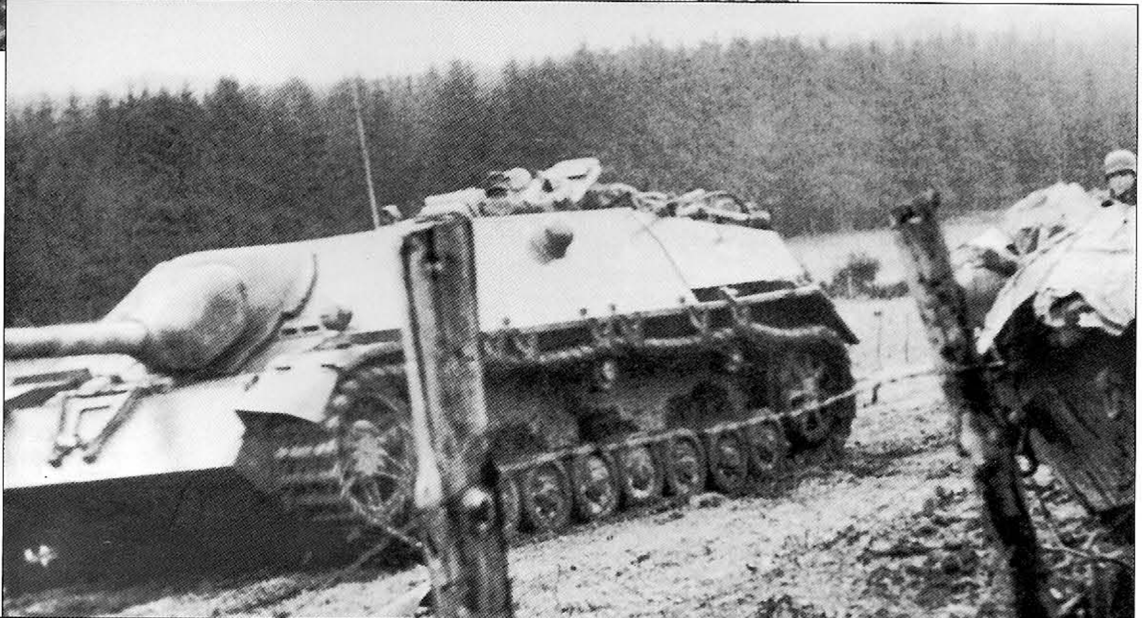


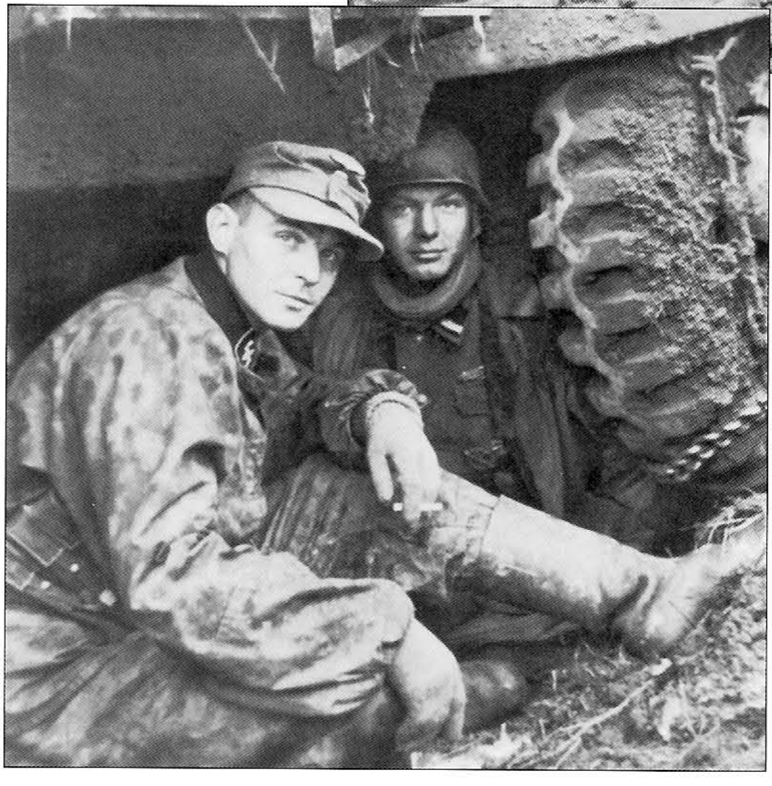
What follows, are a number of staged photographs taken from captured German still and newsreel film, of the members of Kampfgruppe Hansen as they pass by the abandoned and destroyed vehicles of the 14th Cavalry Group. Two SS-Rottenführer, one of which is armed with an MP44 assault rifle, accompanied by two other SS grenadiers, walk along the north side of the road past a pair of M3A1 half-tracks.



An M8 armored car and an M5A1 Stuart light tank near the end of the American column. On the right is a 3-inch anti-tank gun that was being towed by one of the M3A1 half-tracks. It appears that as the attack on the column began, the crew unlimbered the gun in an attempt to face the attackers, but was unable to get into action before being caught up in the withdrawal back to Poteau.

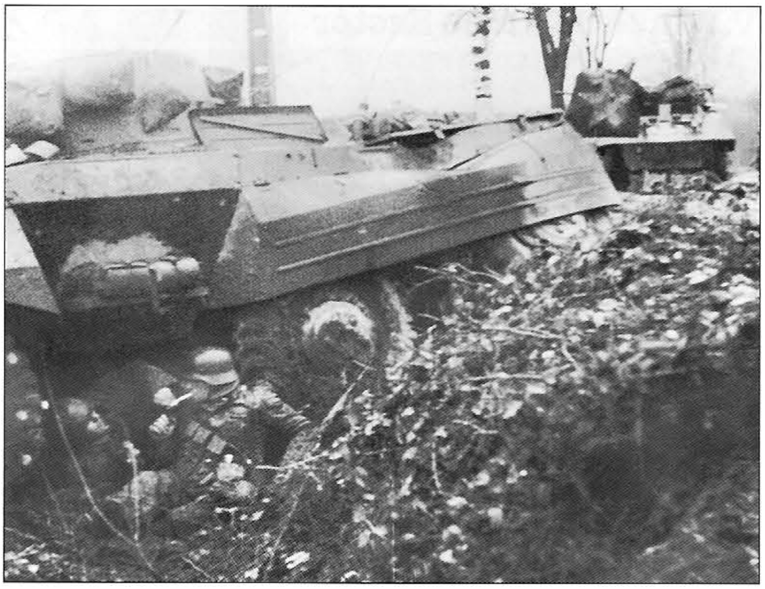
A photograph of another Jagdpanzer IV/70 (V) of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 in the field on the south side of the road, this time heading back towards the east. Visible to the right is the rear end of an M2A1 half-track that appears to have tried to back down the steep embankment beside the road.

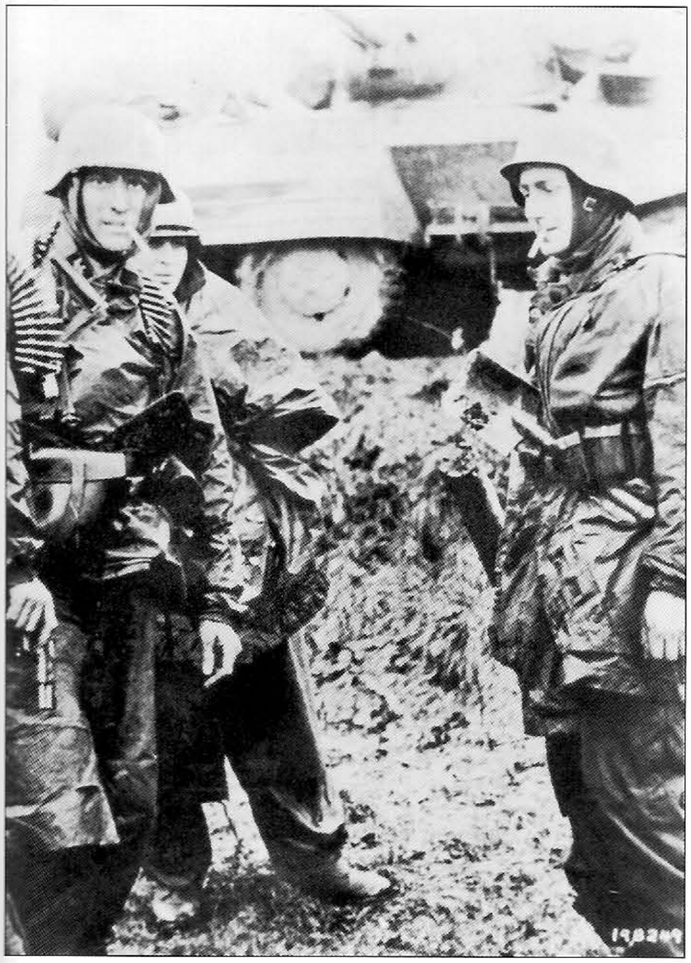




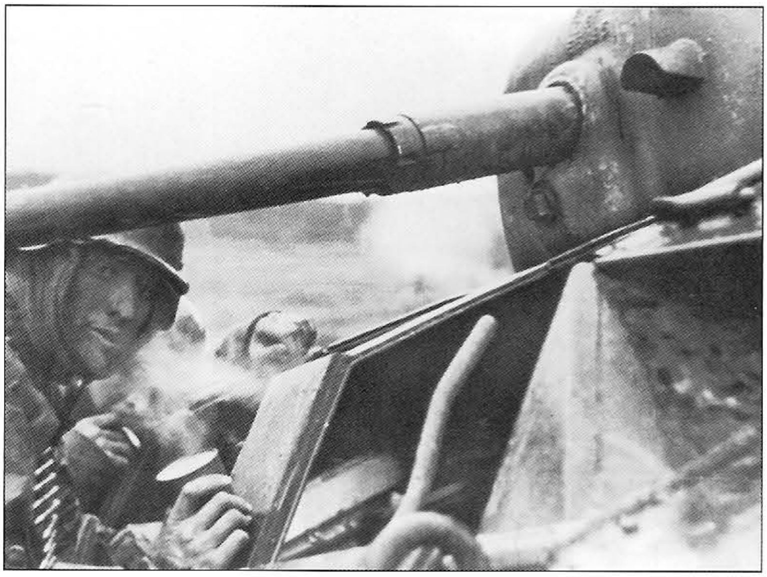
An SS-Untersturmführer and the SS-Rottenführer seen in the previous photograph, relax and enjoy a captured American cigarette under an M8 armored car. The SS-Rottenführer has been highly decorated and is wearing a Close Combat Clasp over his pocket, an Infantry Assault Badge and an Iron Cross First Class. He also has an Iron Cross Second Class ribbon and an Eastern Winter 1941-42 ribbon in the second buttonhole on his tunic.

The same two SS-Rottenführer from the previous photograph share American cigarettes under the M8 armored car. This view gives a good indication of how steep the embankment was beside the road. Several U.S vehicles became immobilized when they attempted to drive off the road and into the adjacent field.



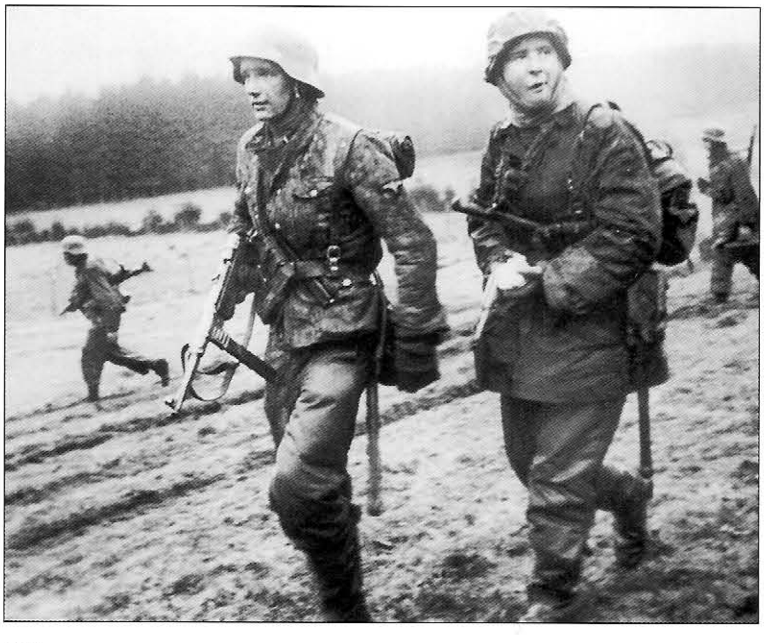


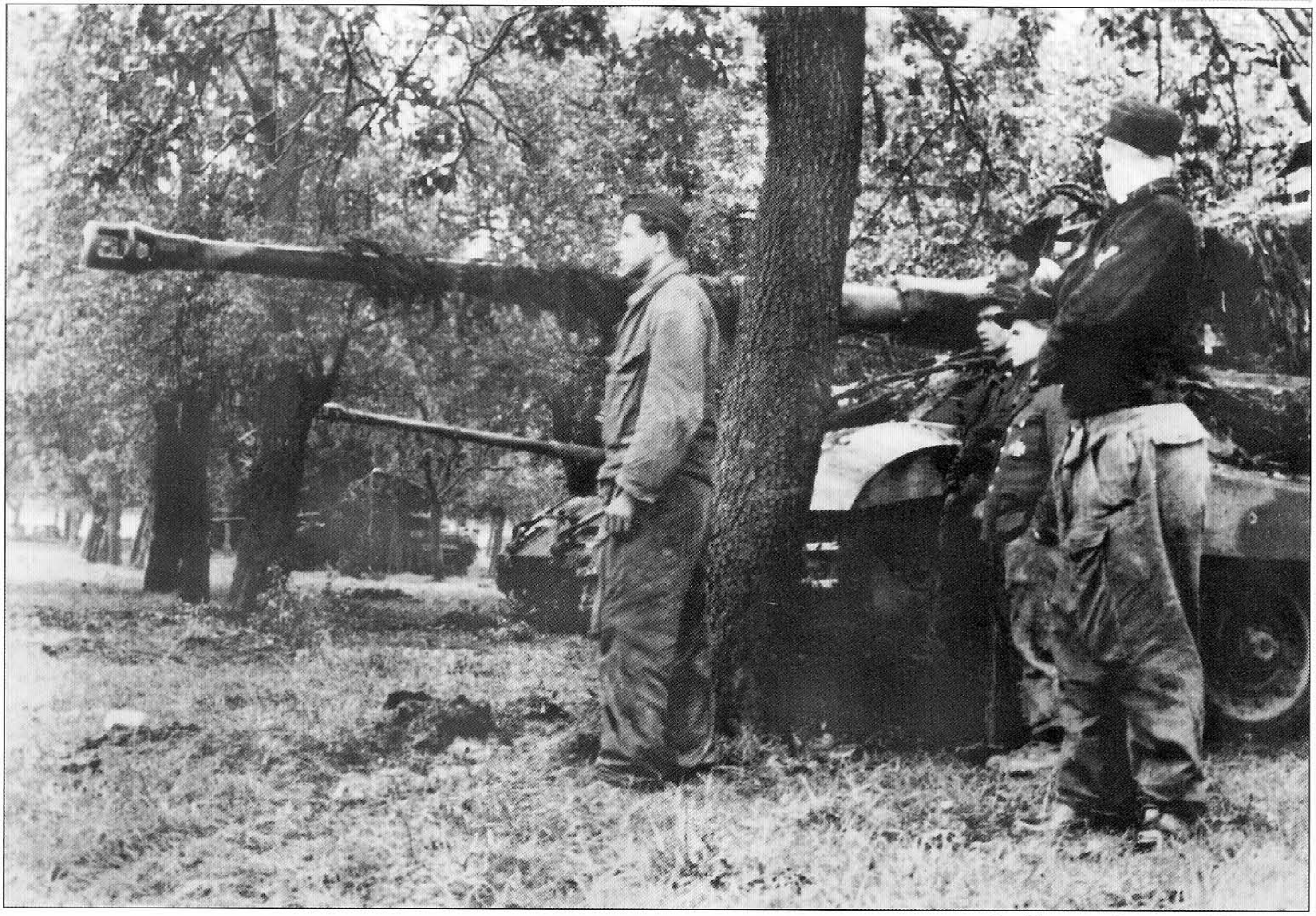
An SS-Schütz machine gunner and two paratroopers from 3.Fallschirmjäger-Division share captured American cigarettes at the edge of the field. Behind them is one of the six M8 armored cars from 18th Cavalry Squadron, 14th Cavalry Group abandoned on the road that day. The SS-Schütz is wearing a captured G.I. rain poncho over his uniform and is also armed with a 9mm Browning High-Power pistol as a personal weapon. The pouch on his belt contains the cleaning tools for his MG42. The paratrooper on the right is wearing a late model splinter pattern camouflage jump smock that he has added a non-standard zippered pocket to the upper left sleeve.

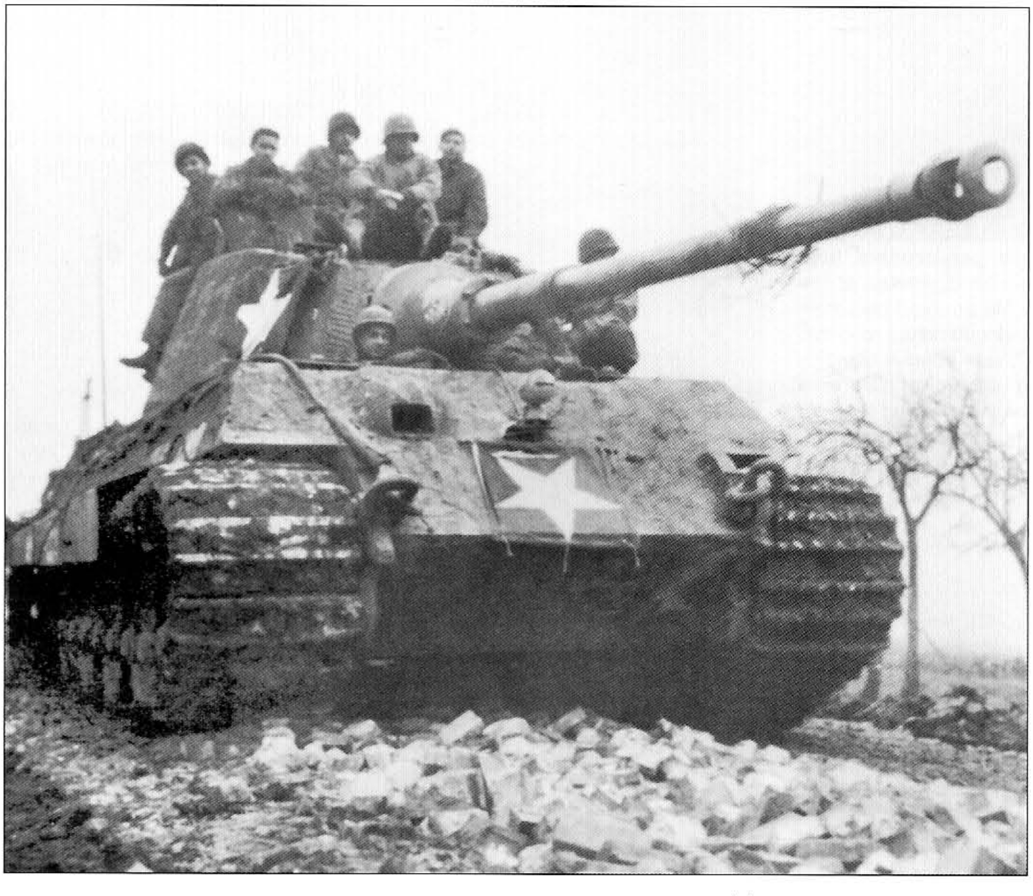


The SS-Schütz machine gunner holds a can of American rations salvaged from one of the M8 armored cars. U.S. troops were very well fed compared to their German enemy.

The SS-Grenadiers now head back east for the cameraman. Poteau is to the right. The tracks in the field are most likely from the Jagdpanzer IV's of SS-Panzerjager-Abteilung 1 as they moved around the blocked road.



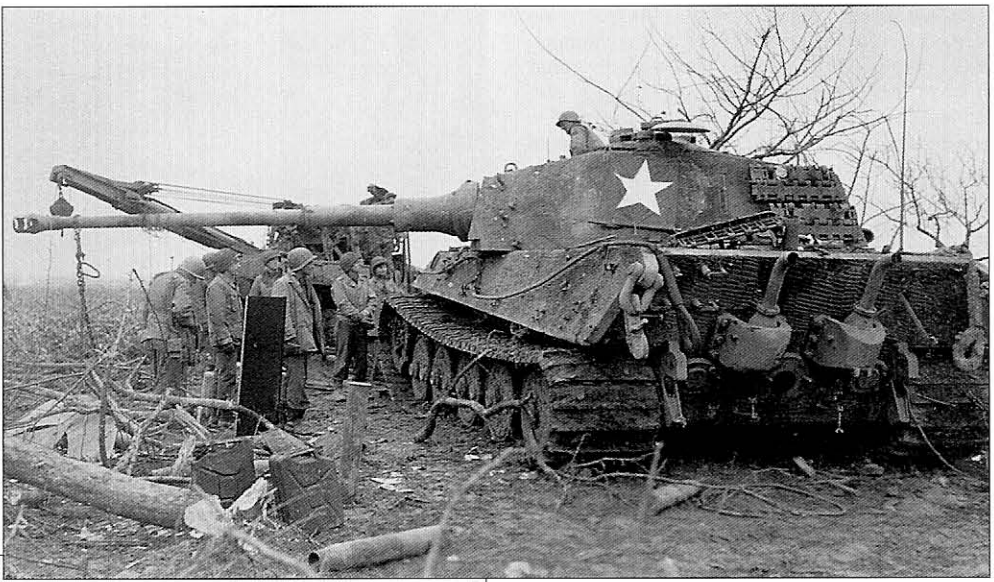


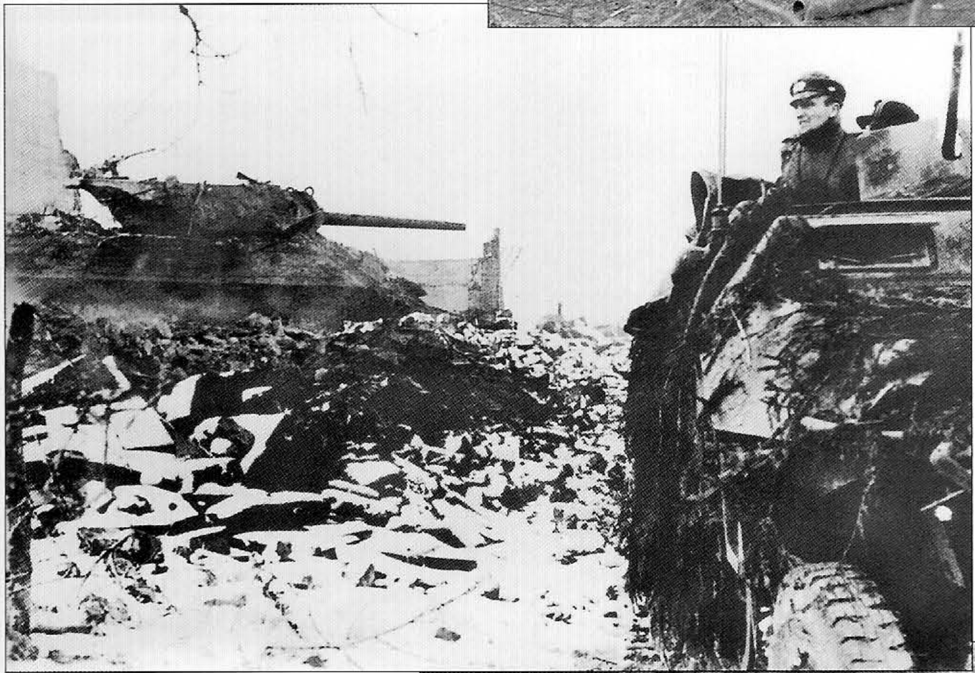


Besides schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, the only other Tiger unit to see action in the Ardennes was schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506. Originally assigned to VI.Panzer-Armee, they were quickly transferred to V.Panzer-Armee when it was realized that 2.SS-Panzer-Korps had stalled in its attack. Here, Tigers and men from s.Pz.Abt.506 are formed up in an orchard in the Aachen area in October 1944.

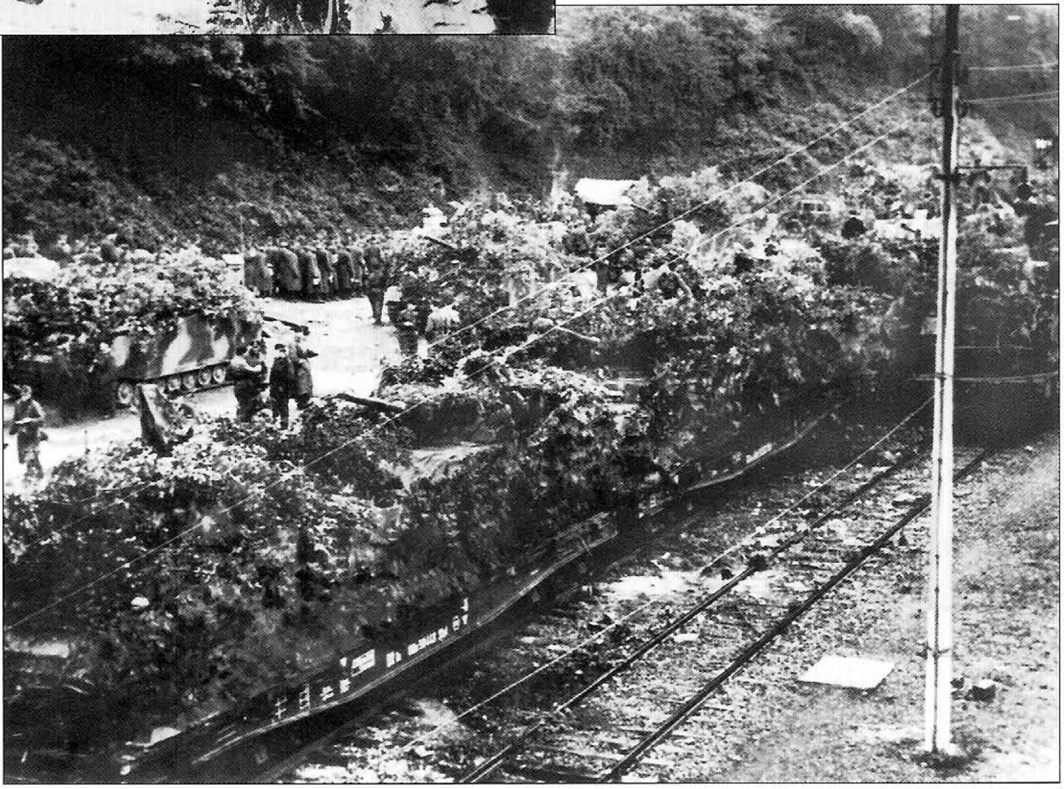
This Tiger II, tactical number '2 + 11', from schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506 was captured intact by American forces near Geronsweiler in early December. Cloth panels with large Allied stars painted on them are hung on the turret and hull to help identify the new owners and prevent drawing friendly fire. The photo was taken on 15 December.

Another view of Tiger II number '2 + 11' from s.Pz.Abt.506 after capture with men from the U.S. 129th Ordnance Battalion.



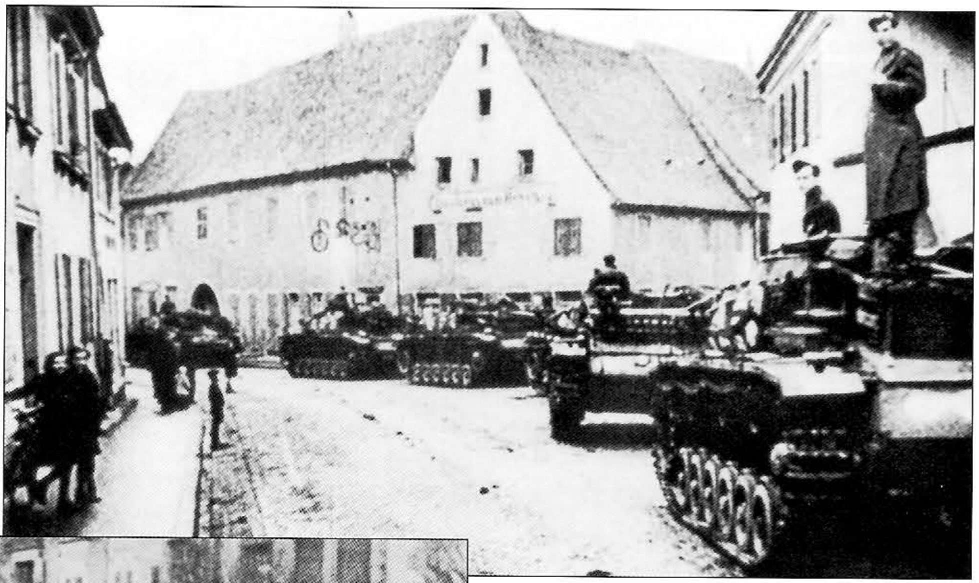


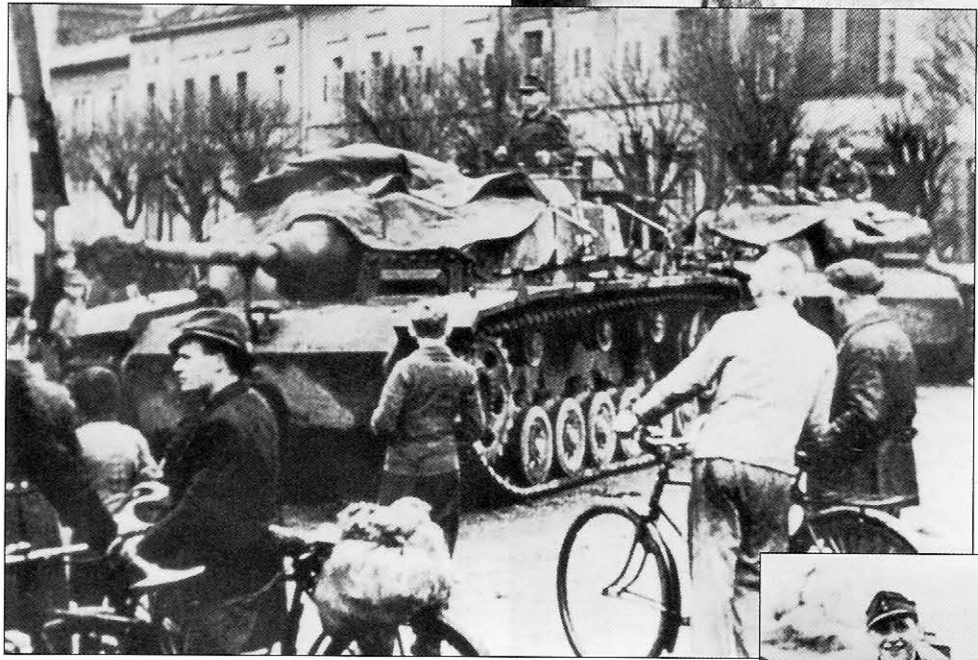
An Sd.Kfz.251/3 command half-track from 8./Pz.Gren.Rgt.28, 116.Panzer-Division passes a knocked out M10 tank destroyer in Belgium in December 1944. After being almost destroyed in France during the summer, they saw action in the Aachen area before being withdrawn and brought up to strength for the planned offensive. 116.Panzer-Divisions 'Windhund' emblem badge can be seen on the side of the officer's cap.



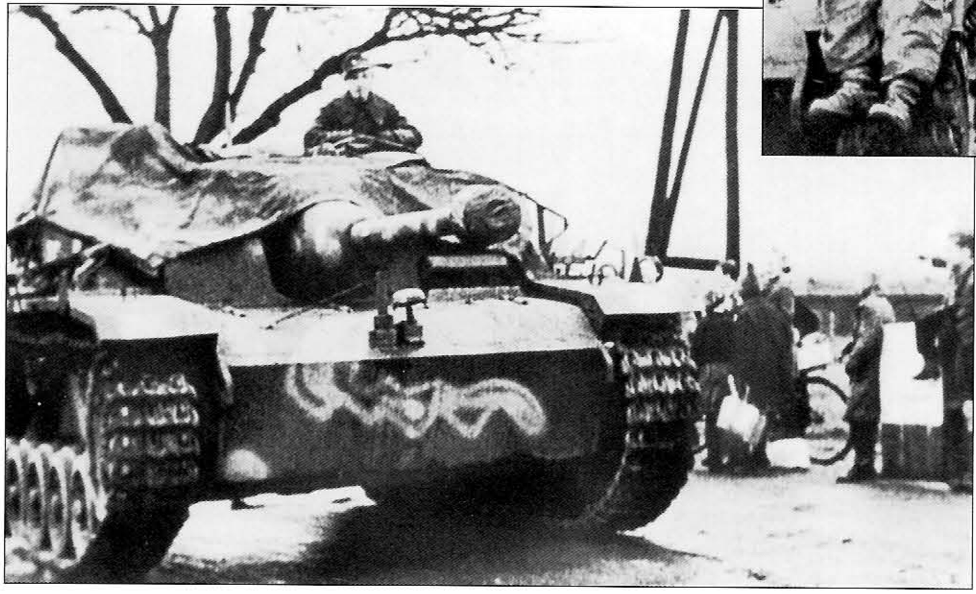
A train, carrying its load of heavily camouflaged armored vehicles, arrives in an assembly area just before the start of the offensive. Just enough is visible to identify them as Pz.Kpfw.IV plus one Flakpanzer IV Möbelwagen, mounting a 3.7cm FlaK43 anti-aircraft gun, at the rear. They are probably early Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J and are painted in overall dark yellow with a camouflage scheme of large dark green and brown patches.

A column of StuG.III Ausf.G assault guns from an unidentified unit, halt on a street through a German city on the way to their assembly area prior to the offensive. At this stage in the war, Sturmgeschütz companies were found not only in Panzer-Grenadier divisions but also a number of the Panzer-Divisions as well.

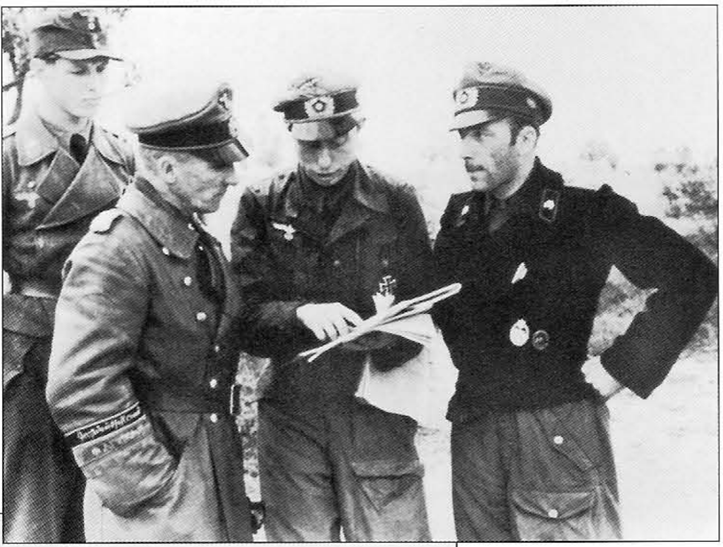


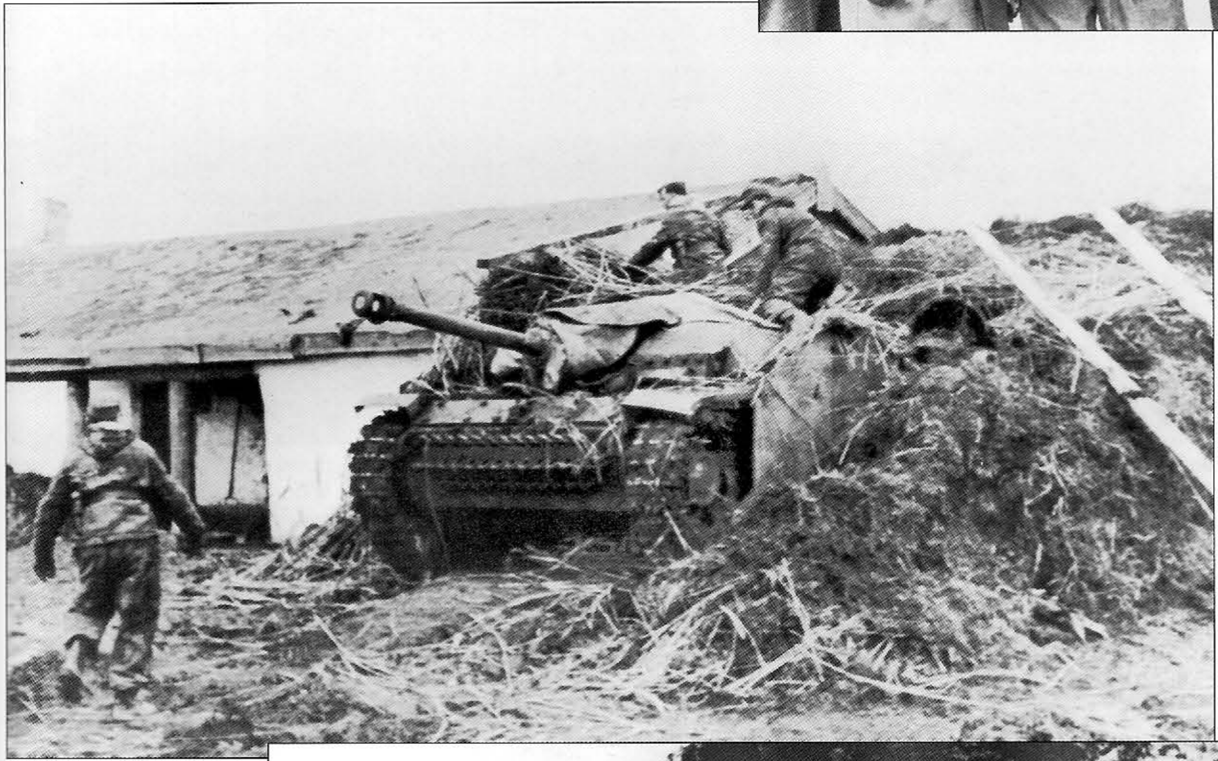


The column of Sturmgeschütz continues through the city while German civilians watch in interest. These are late model StuG.III Ausf.G with 'Topfblende' mantlets, 80mm armor plates on the front of the hull and right side of the superstructure, gun travel supports and shot deflectors in front of the cupola. The Schürzen support rails are lying on top of the mudguard and the plates themselves may just be carried loosely on the engine deck. One of the crew smiles optimistically for the cameraman.

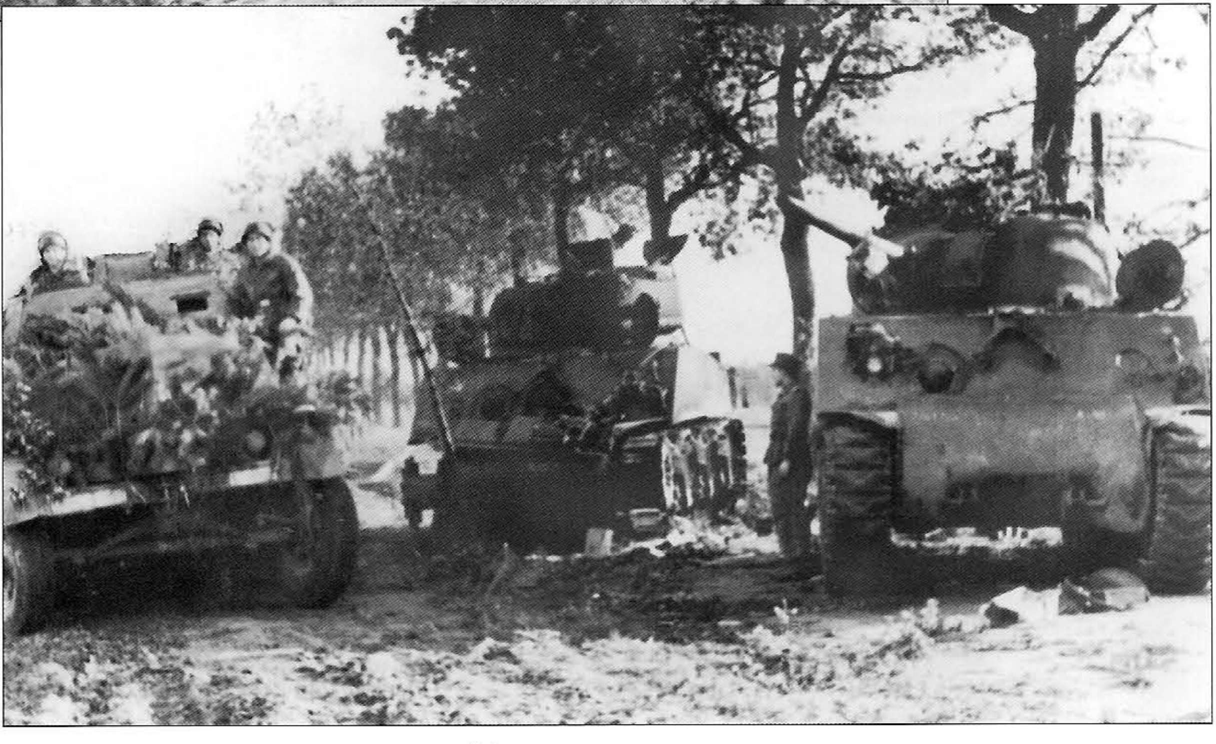


V.Panzer-Armee was reformed in France during August 1944. General der Panzertruppen Hasso von Manteuffel took command in September and led it in the defensive battles through the Lorraine area and up around Aachen. Here he confers with officers of 116.Panzer-Division – note the 'Windhund' badge on their caps – prior to the offensive. A former commander of 'Großdeutschland' and a veteran of the Afrikakorps, he wears the cuffband titles of both on the right sleeve of his greatcoat.

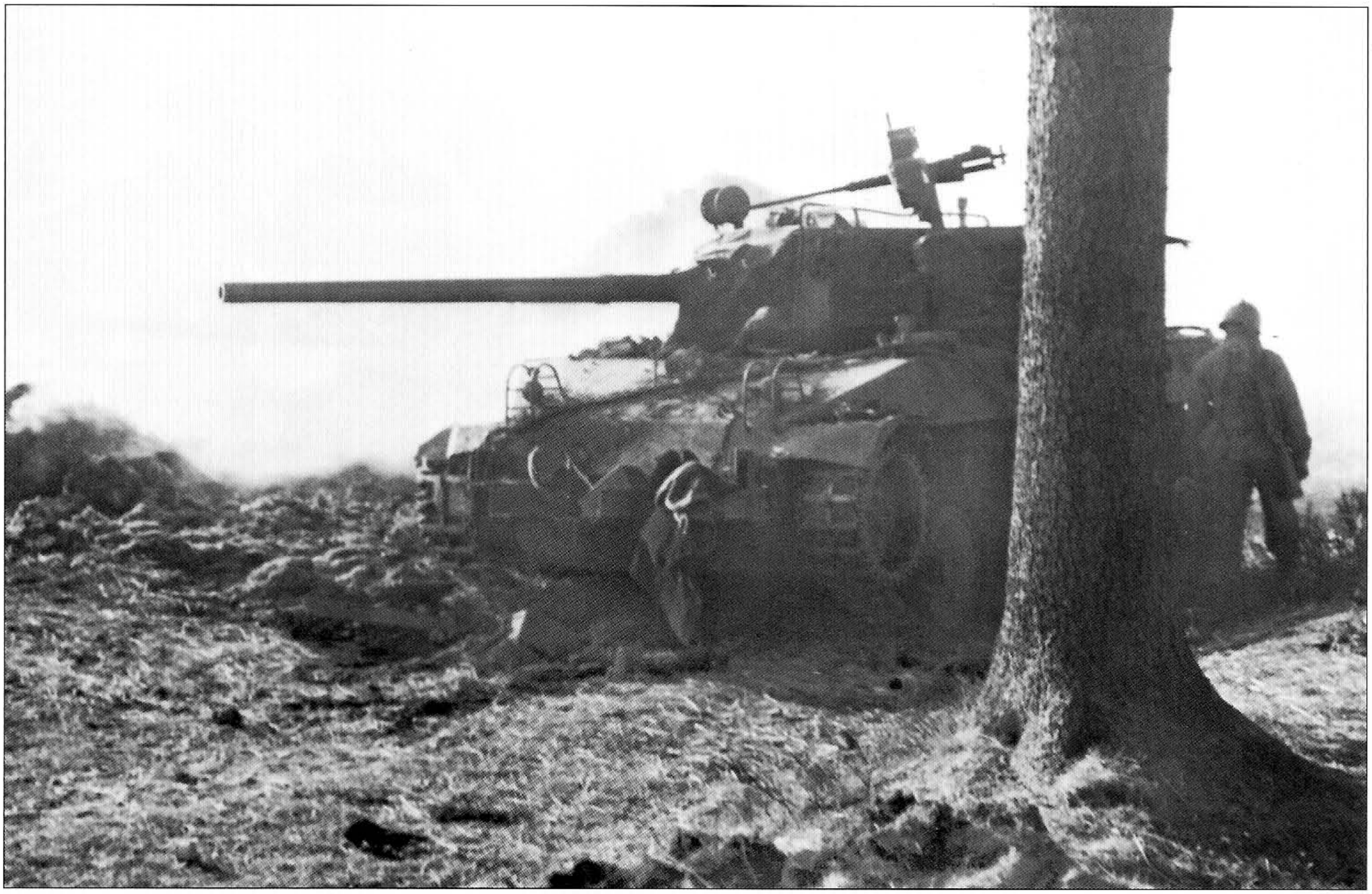




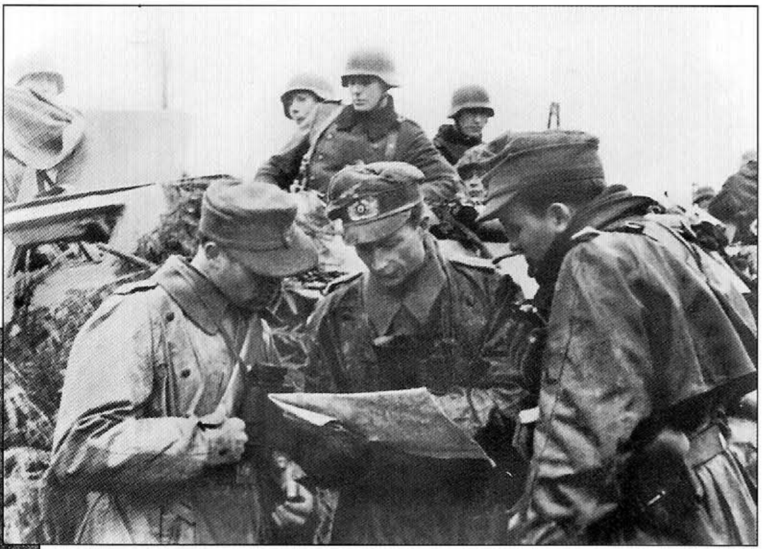
The crew of this StuG.III Ausf.G remove the straw cover over their vehicle as they prepare to go into battle. It is an early production vehicle fitted with additional 30mm armor plates bolted to the front of the hull and fighting compartment, a practice that was dropped in favor of single 80mm plates beginning in May 1943. All three are wearing the two piece reversible winter suit with splinter pattern camouflage on one side and white on the other.



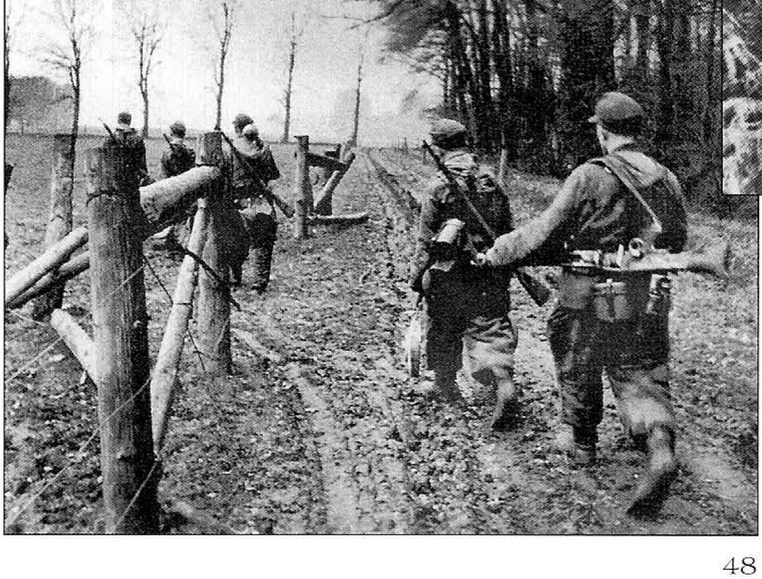
An Sd.Kfz.7/1 armored half-track mounting a 2cm Flakvierling anti-aircraft gun, bypasses two knocked out M4A3 Sherman tanks of the 17th Tank Battalion, 7th Armored Division near St. Vith. At the opening of the offensive, 7th Armored Division was ordered south to reinforce the American VIII Corps holding the area around St. Vith. After a week of stubborn resistance, the town was evacuated by the Americans on 22 December and occupied by the German LXVI.Armeekorps.



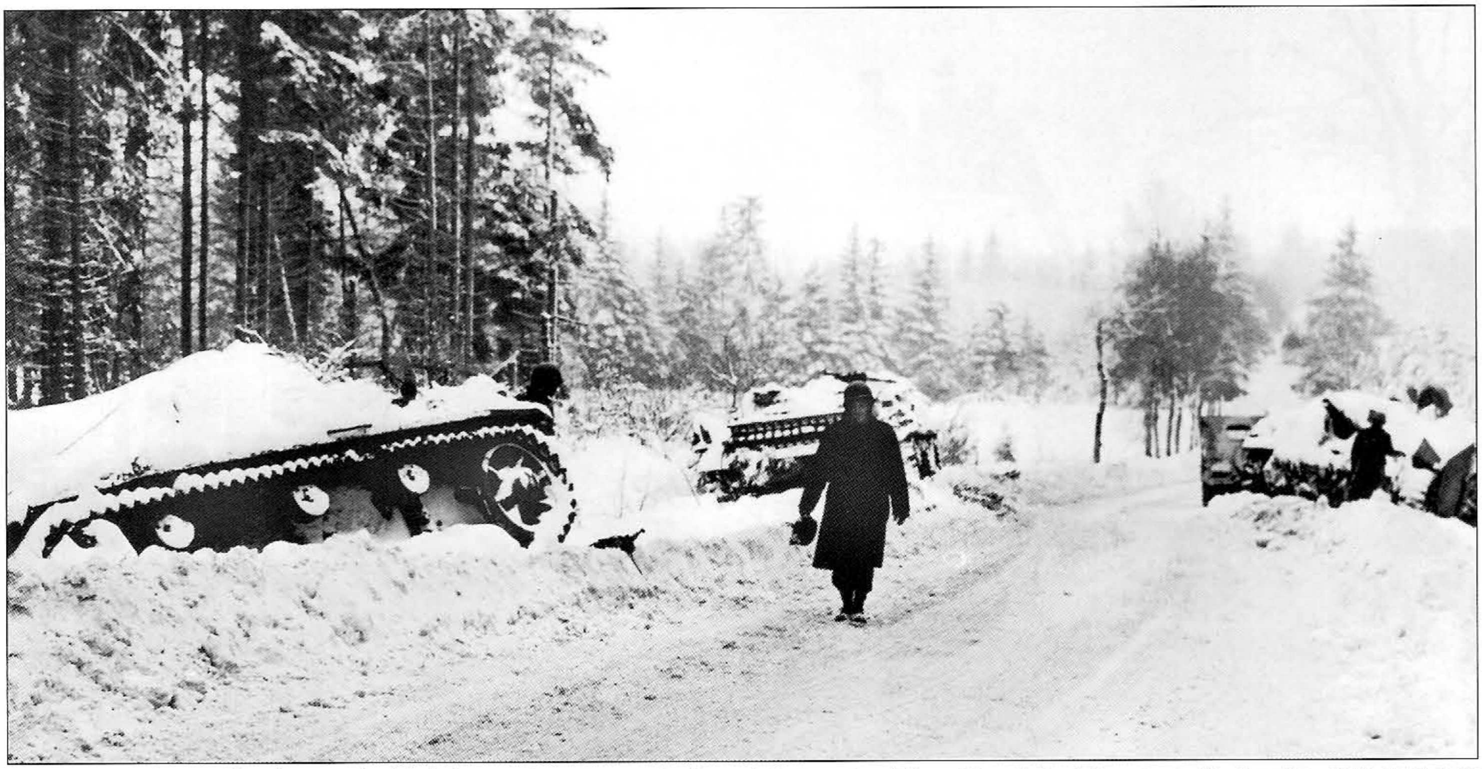
A 76mm Gun Motor Carriage M18, nicknamed the 'Hellcat', lies knocked out in field. The Hellcat was one of the best tank destroyer designs produced by the U.S. during the war and had a top speed of 55 miles per hour, almost 30 miles per hour faster than the other Sherman based designs. Its main drawback was its thin armor, not more than half an inch on most vertical surfaces, and the open top that provided little protection for its crew. This one appears to be a veteran of the Normandy battles judging by the Culin hedgerow cutters on the front.



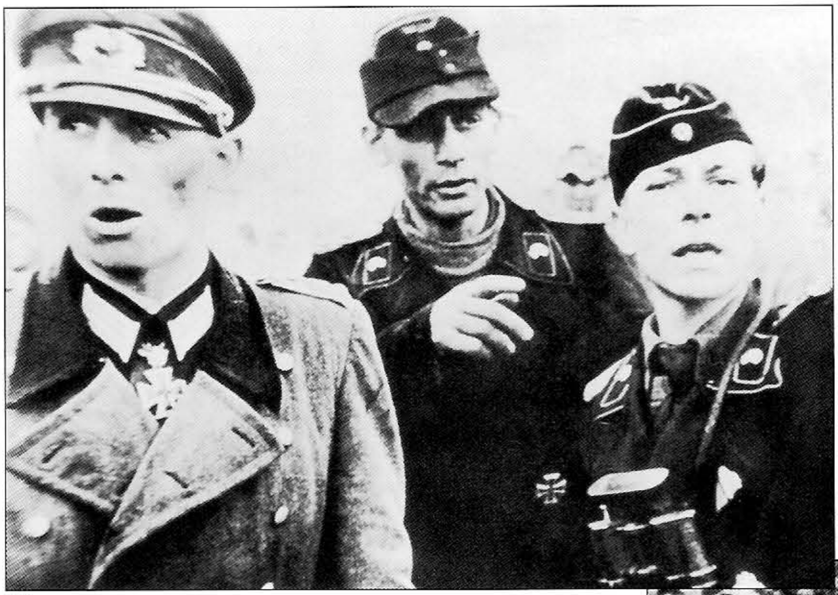
German officers consult a map during the early days of the offensive. All of them are wearing the rubberized motorcycle coat, a popular uniform item often seen being worn by officers and men in other branches of the service. Behind them, is an Sd.Kfz.251/1 Ausf.D half-track carrying a squad of Panzer-Grenadiers.



German infantry make their way along a dirt track and into a field. It is likely they are somewhere behind the front lines as they would probably not be so careless to expose themselves crossing an open field if the enemy were near. The man bringing up the rear is carrying an MG42 machine gun while the man in front of him is carrying a Tellermine 42 and a Mauser Kar 98K rifle slung over his shoulder. The man in the middle is carrying a single-shot Panzerfaust 60 anti-tank rocket launcher in addition to his 98K rifle.

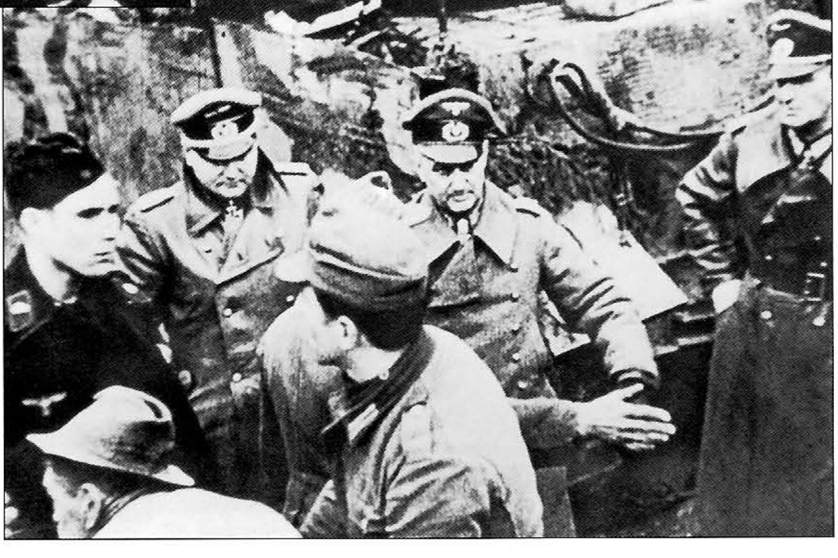


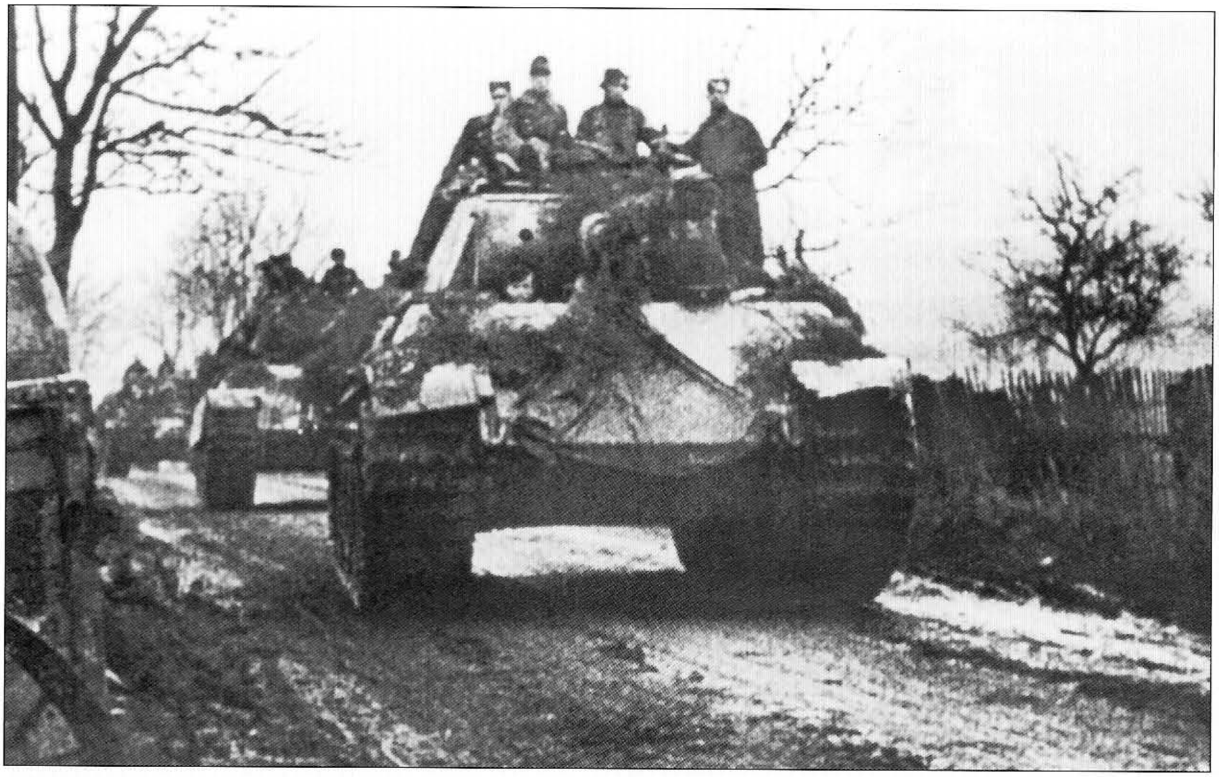
Five American soldiers have parked their jeep and are rummaging through the wrecks of three Stug.III Ausf.G pushed off to the side of the road near St. Vith. The G.I. on the road has picked up one of the ubiquitous German helmets as a souvenir. Had they only known the value these might have some day to future generations of collectors.



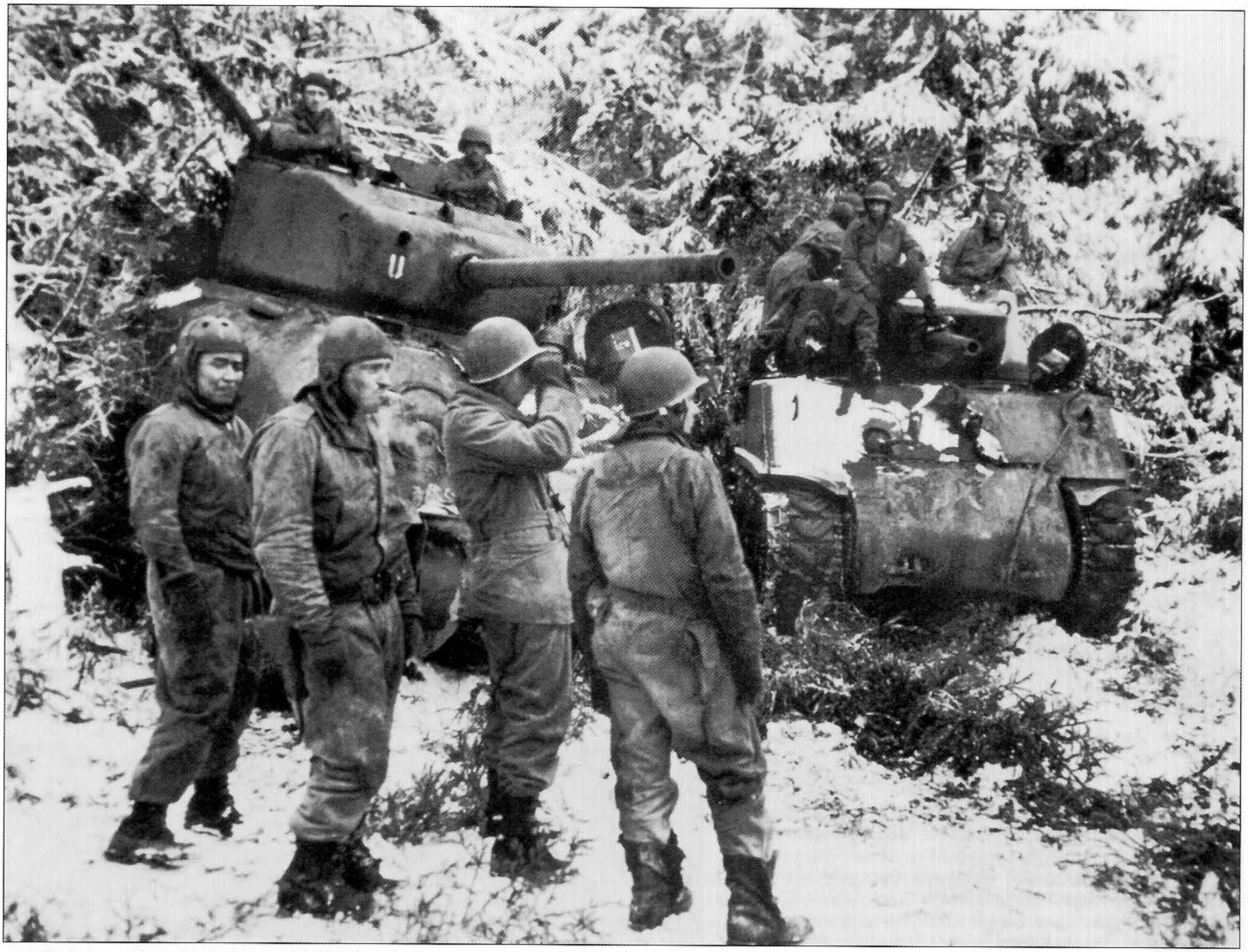
Oberst Otto Remer, commander of the Führer-Begleit-Brigade, in an animated conversation with two of his Panzer officers, during the early days of the offensive. Along with 18. and 62.Volks-Grenadier-Divisions, the brigade captured St.Vith on 21 December. The former Führer-Begleit-Bataillon was expanded to a brigade in November 1944, with II./Pz.Rgt.Großdeutschland as its I.Bataillon, equipped with 24 Pz.Kpfw.IV and 43 Pz.IV/70 (A), and Stu.Gesch.Brig.200 as its II.Abteilung equipped with 28 StuG.III. Remer gained fame when, as a Major in command of the Berlin Garrison on 20 July, he was personally promoted to Oberst by Adolf Hitler and ordered to arrest all the conspirators after the failure of the bomb plot. The brigade was expanded to a paper division in January 1945 with Generalmajor Remer as its commander and finished the war in Czechoslovakia.

Generalfeldmarschall Walther Model, commander of Heeresgruppe B, and his Chief-of-Staff, General der Infanterie Hans Krebs, during an inspection of II./Panzer-Regiment 16 before the offensive. Neither Model nor Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt, Commander-in-Chief Ob.West, were enthusiastic supporters of the operation, believing it beyond the means of their forces. Behind them is a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J of 5.Kompanie, 116.Panzer-Division. It appears to have a rather unusual camouflage scheme painted on its Schürzen.

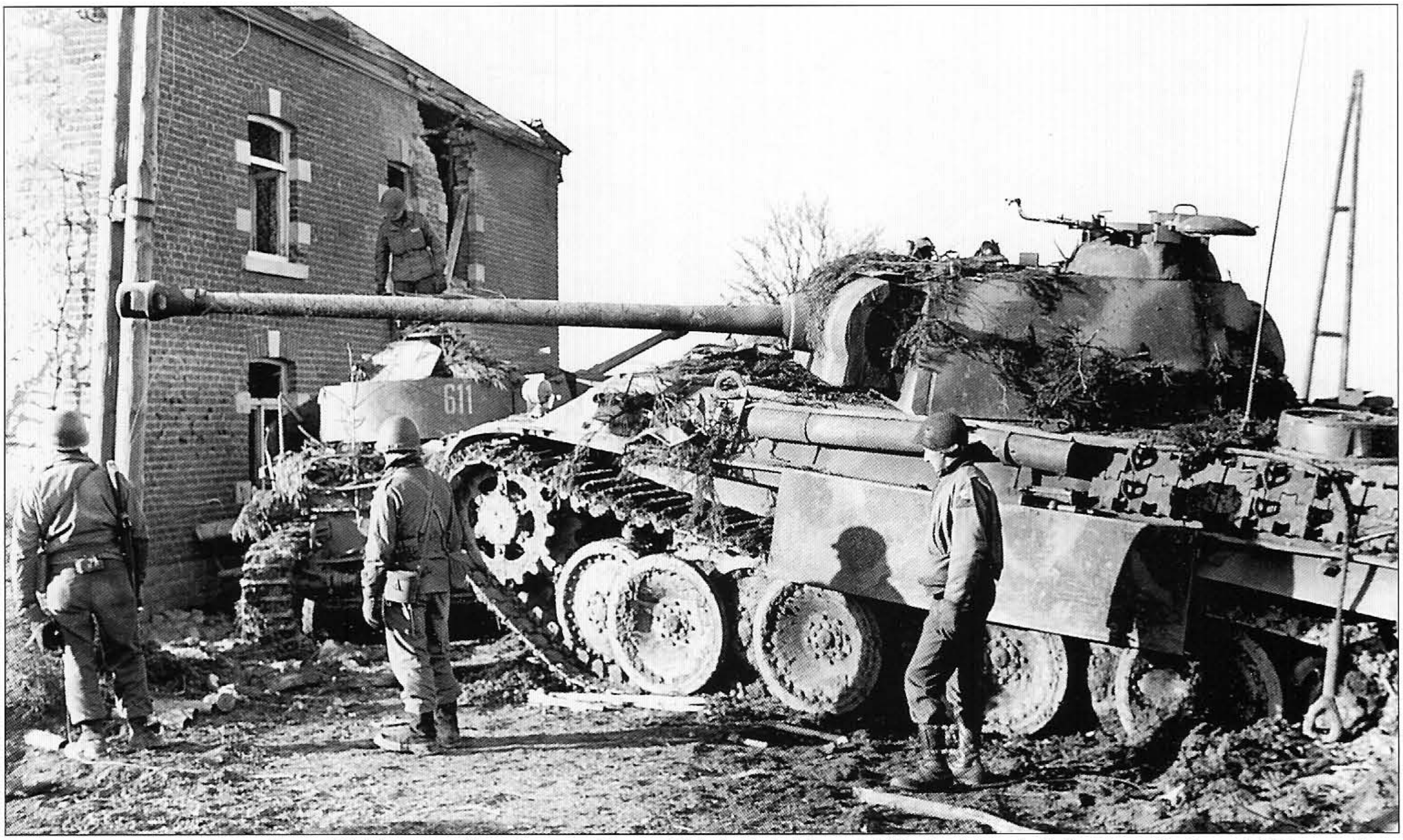




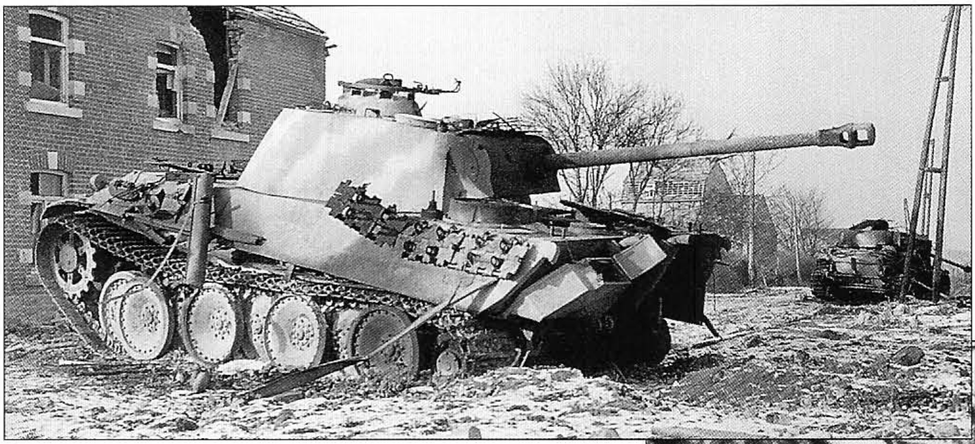
Panthers of 116.Panzer-Division advance towards Hotton on 19 December. As LVIII.Korps approached the bridge over the Ourthe River near Bertogne, it was blown up by the Americans forcing General Walter Krüger to rerout his troops back through Houffalize and redirecting them towards Hotton and Marche. This was to be a fateful decision as 116.Panzer-Division may have reached the Meuse River had they continued their advance.



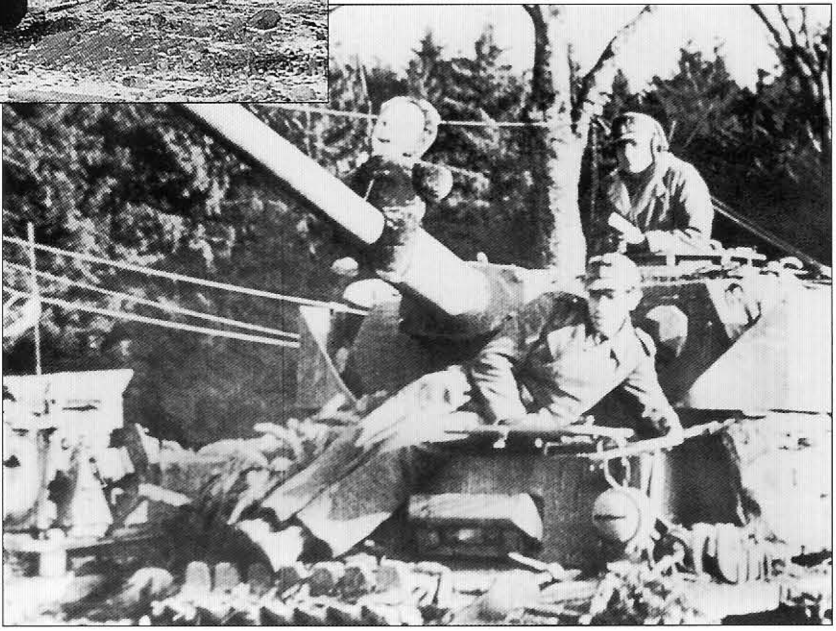
Tank crews from the 3rd Armored Division take a cigarette break at the edge of a forest. The tanks are a Sherman M4A1(76)W and an M4A3E2 'Jumbo' up-armored assault Sherman armed with a 75mm gun. By this time the 'Bulge' was slowly being reduced.



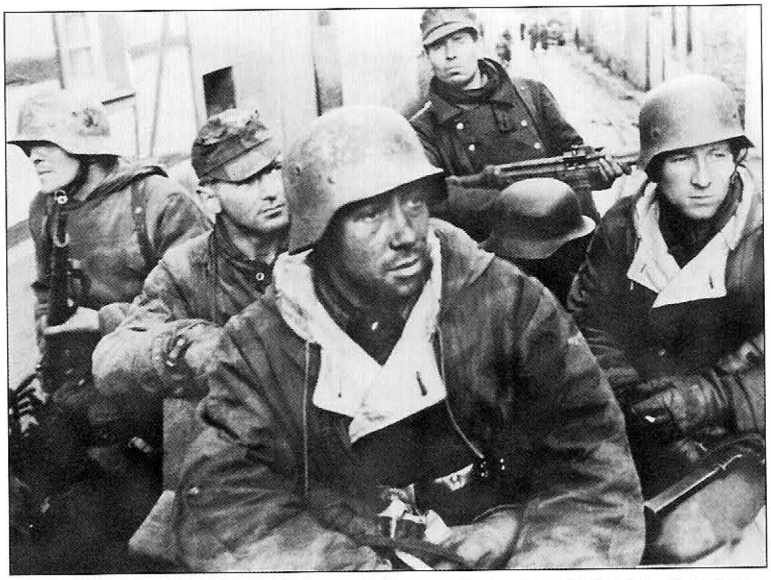
The spearhead of 116.Panzer-Division was Kampfgruppe Bayer which included I. and II./Pz.Rgt.16, a battalion from Pz.Gren.Rgt.60, one from Pz.Art.Rgt.146 and engineers from Pz.Pi.Btl.675, attempted to capture Hotton on 21 December. After encountering stiff resistance and losing several tanks, General Krüger again decided to withdraw 116.Panzer-Division and reroute it again through La Roche in the direction of Marche. Here, a Panther from I.Abteilung and a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J from II.Abteilung, are being inspected by men from the 3rd Armored Division after the battle.



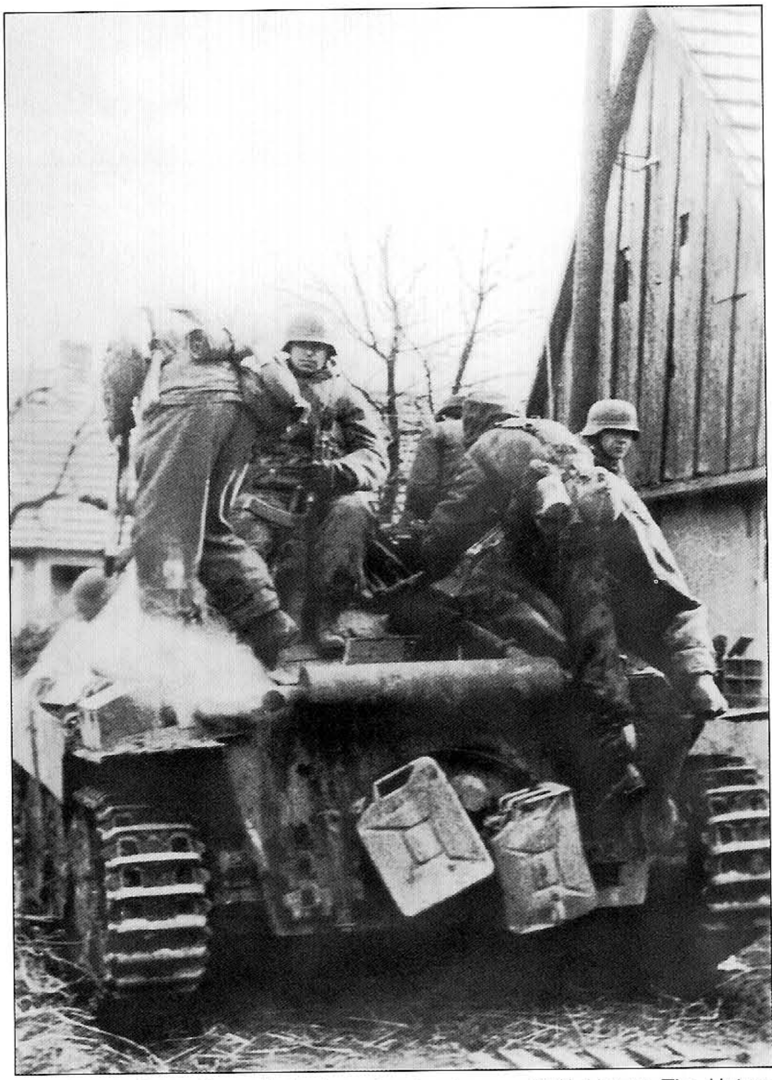
Another photo of the same Panther taken some time later having sustained some additional damage and after the Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J had been moved to clear the roadway. The Flammentöter vertical exhaust can now be clearly seen on the rear of the Pz.KPfw.IV.



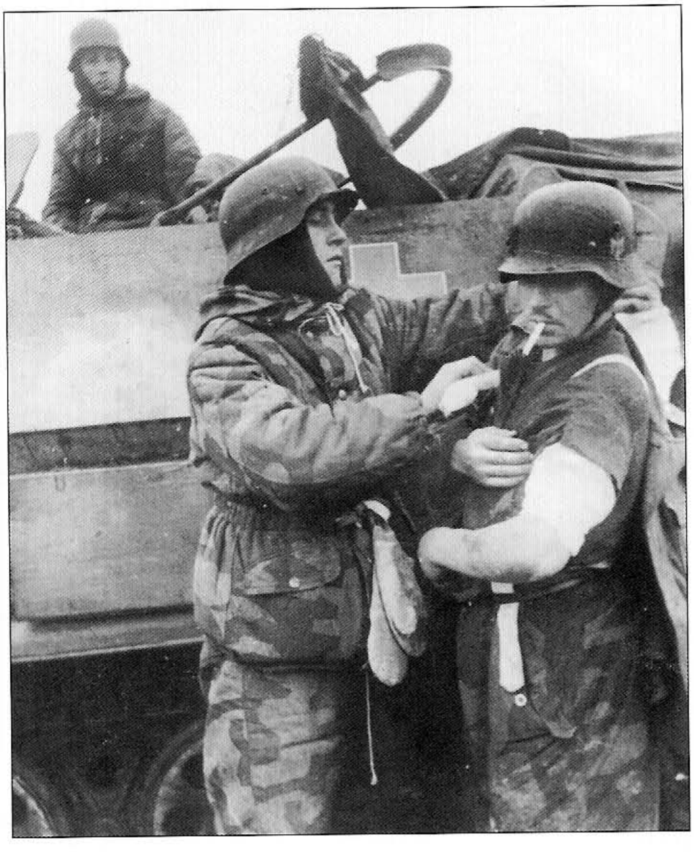
A Panzerbeobachtungswagen IV Ausf.J from Pz.Art.Rgt.74, 2.Panzer-Division passes, what is likely an M5A1 Stuart light tank from Task Force Harper, on the road to Fetsch, 19 kilometers east of Bastogne. The Pz.Beob.Wg.IV was an armored observation vehicle utilized by the battery commander of the self-propelled artillery battery (Wespe or Hummel) of the artillery regiment. They were equipped with three radio sets, a Fu 8, an Fu 4 and a Fu.Spr.f and were fitted with a commander's cupola taken from a StuG.III Ausf.G, which allowed the SF14Z scissors periscope to be used without opening the complete hatch. The Sternantenne D star antenna for the Fu 8 was mounted in an armored housing on the right side of the rear engine deck plate. In addition, a T.S.R.1 observation periscope was installed in the roof of the turret to the left of the cupola. The coaxial machine gun was removed to make room for the additional radio equipment.



Grenadiers of either 10. or 11.Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment, 9.Panzer-Division, ride through a Belgian village in their Sd.Kfz.251/1 Ausf.D half-track. Three of them are wearing the two piece reversible winter uniform with the splinter pattern camouflage side out. A variety of weapons are seen including a Mauser 98K rifle, an MP40 machine pistol and a MP44 assault rifle.

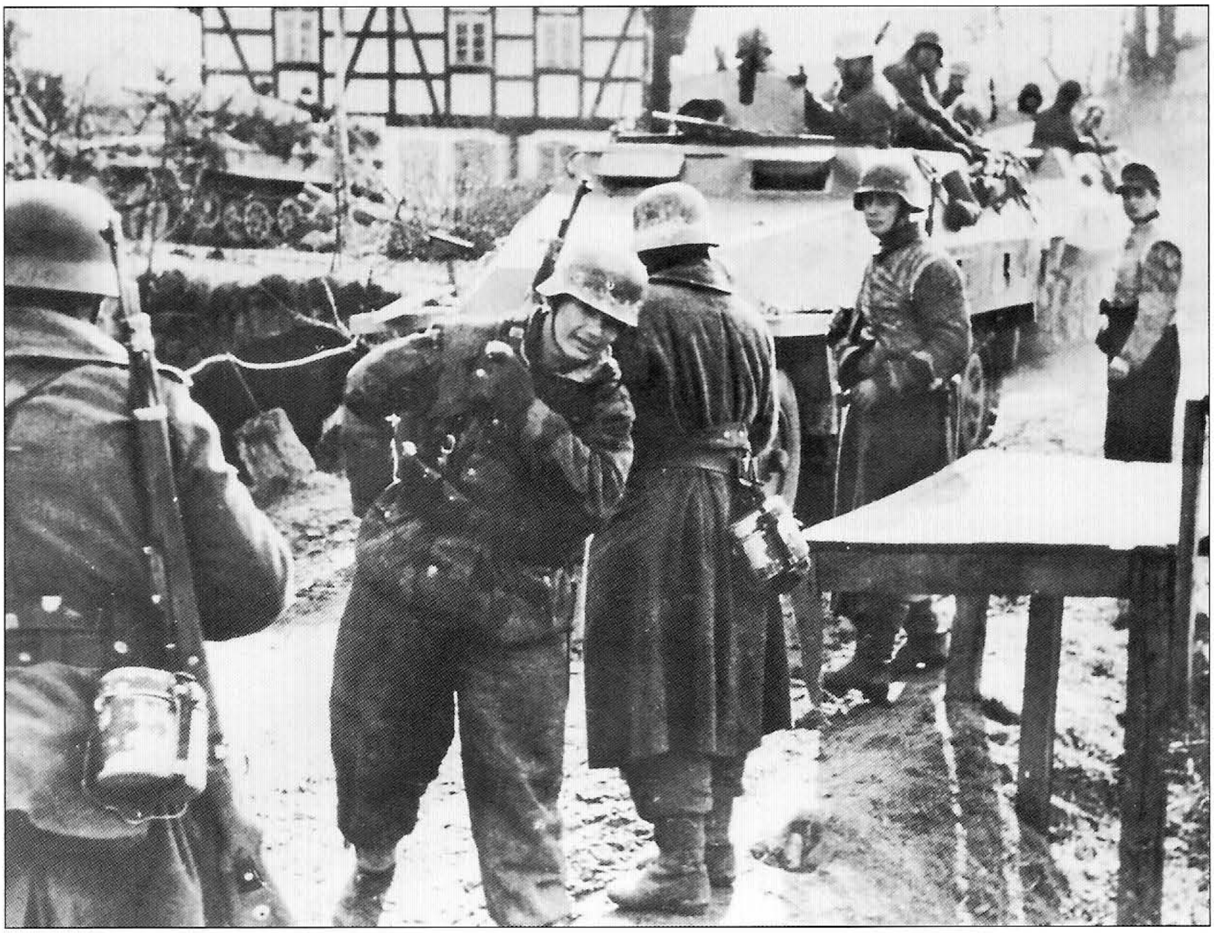


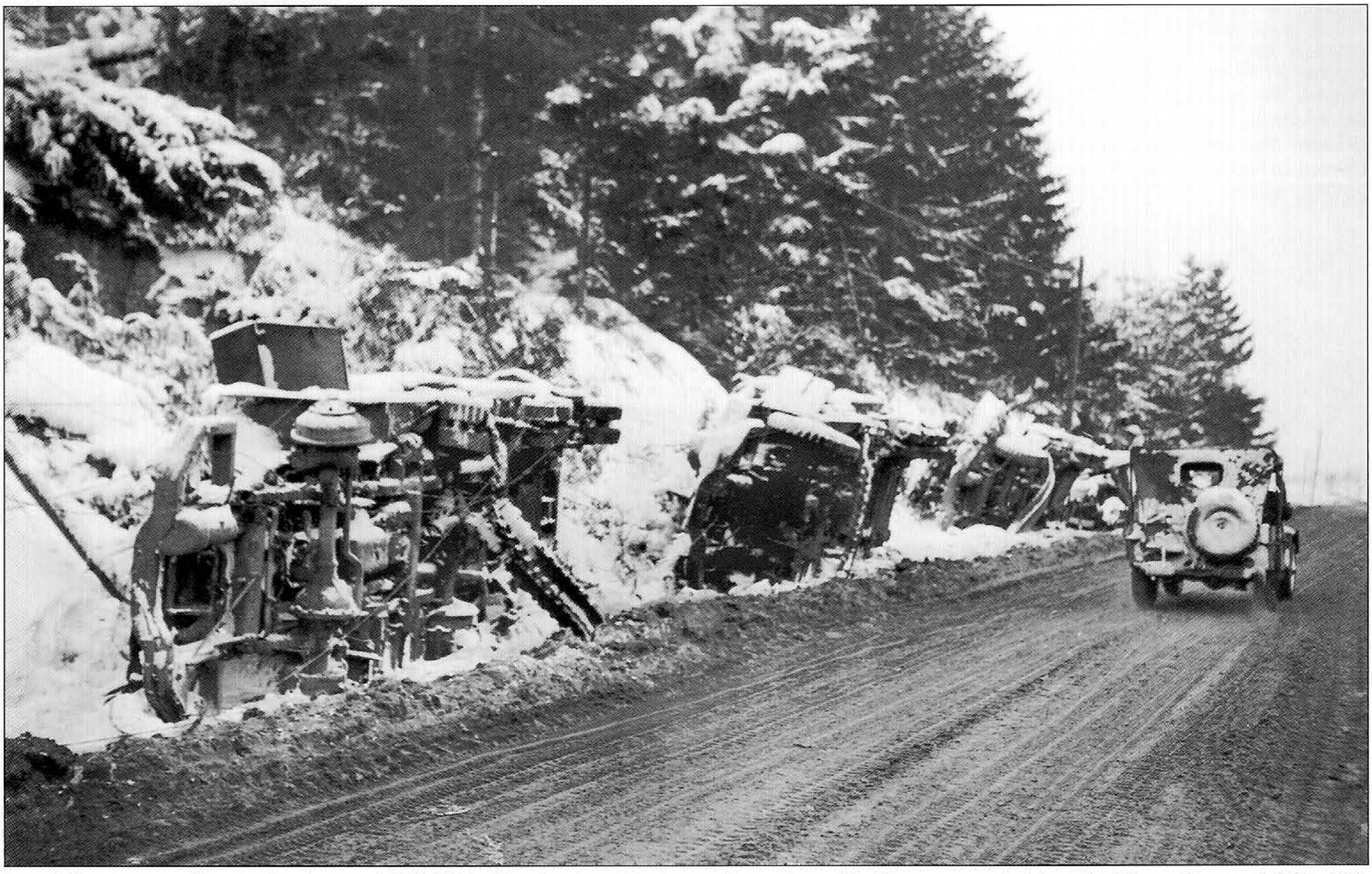
Panzer-Grenadiers climb aboard a Jagdpanzer 38(t) Hetzer. The Hetzer primarily equipped the anti-tank battalions of the infantry and Volks-Grenadier-Divisions to provide armored support. This one is a mid-production version built sometime before October 1944 when the Flammvernichter exhaust was introduced. Two of the grenadiers are armed with MP44 assault rifles.



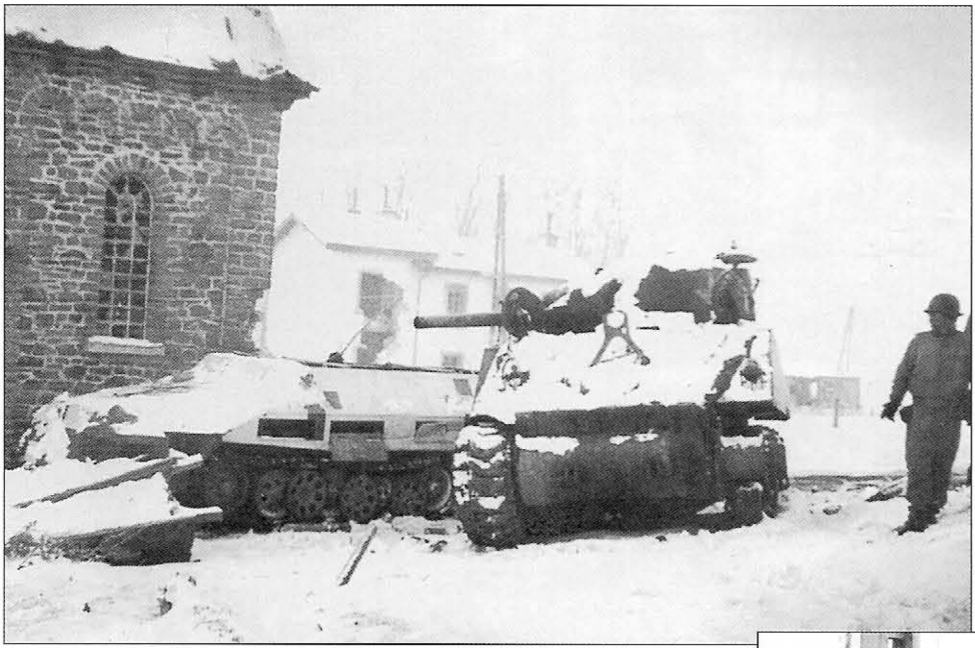
A wounded Panzer-Grenadier has a field dressing applied to his injured arm. All of them are warmly dressed in the Army two-piece winter camouflage suit worn here with the splinter pattern camouflage side out. In the background is an Sd.Kfz.251/8 Ausf.C armored ambulance which, under the Geneva Convention, should not have been armed but as can be seen, is fitted with an MG42 in the gunshield.

Panzer-Grenadiers, wearing a variety of winter clothing, prepare for an attack accompanied by Sd.Kfz.251/1 Ausf.D half-tracks. To the left can be seen a late production Sd.Kfz.251/9 Ausf.D equipped with the 7.5cm KwK37 L/24 gun.

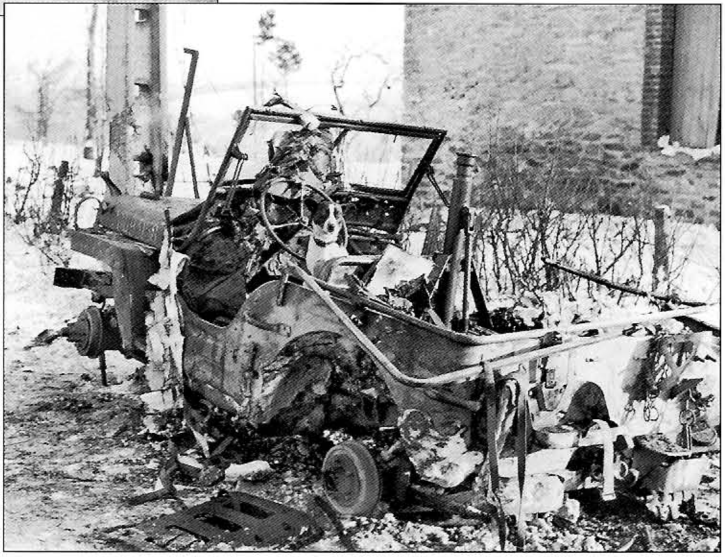




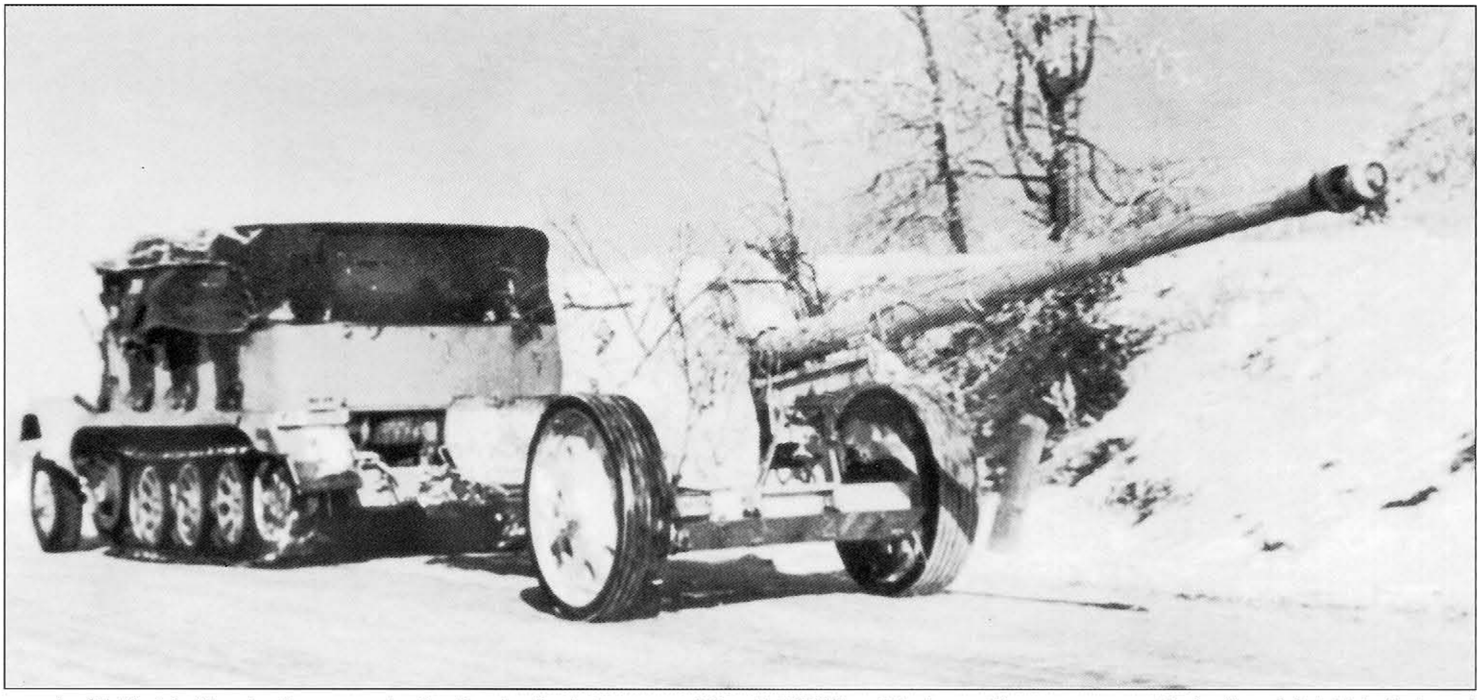
A Jeep passes the wrecks of several U.S. M3 half-tracks alongside the road near Longvilly. They were probably part of Team Cherry of CCB, 10th Armored Division, which was destroyed by a German artillery barrage while caught in a massive traffic jam on 19 December. The remnants fought their way back to the 101st Airborne Division's lines at Bizory.



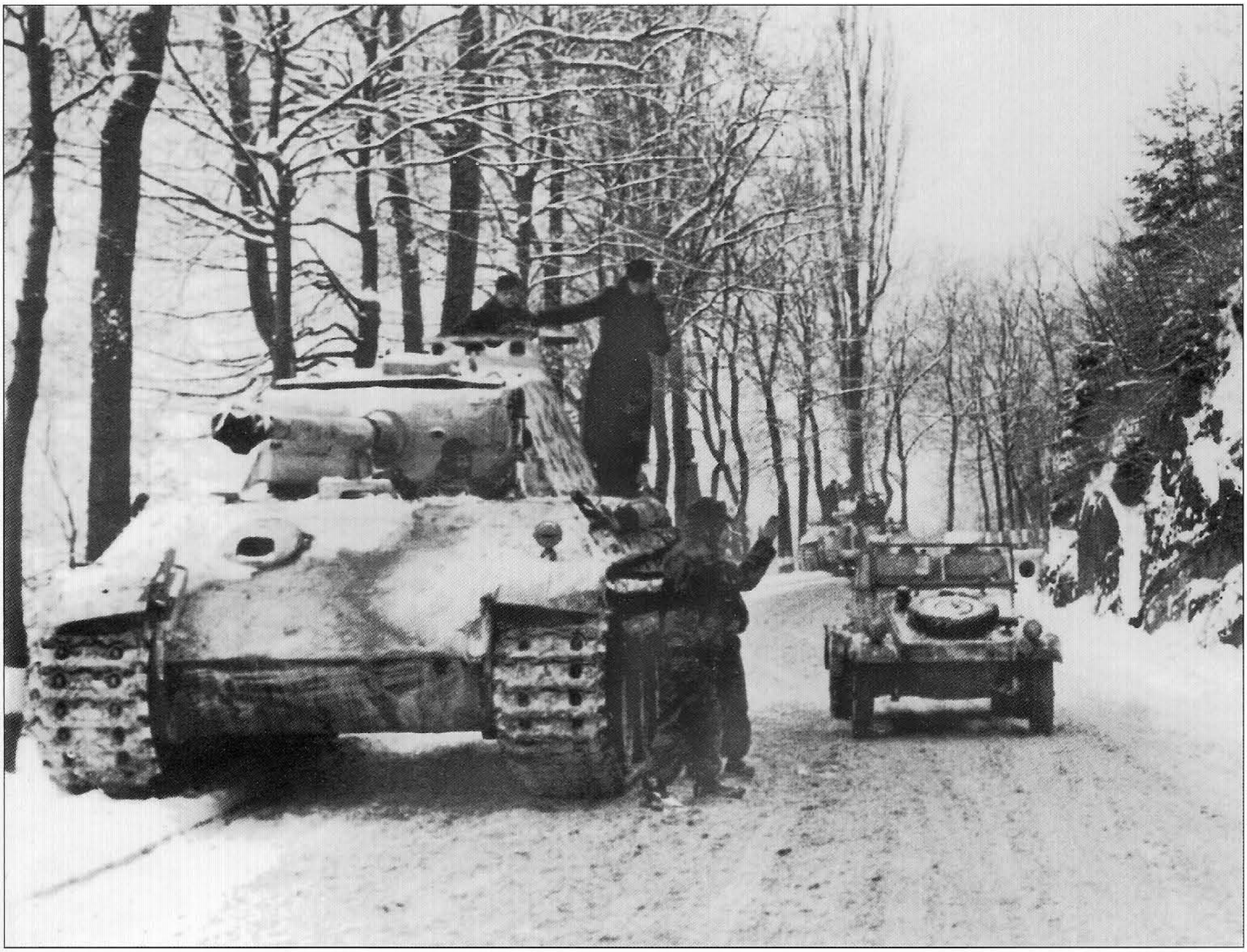
A knocked out M4A3 lies next to an abandoned Sd.Kfz.251/8 Ausf.D armored ambulance from Panzer-Lehr-Division in the hamlet of Neffe. The Sherman may be from the U.S. 6th Armored Division which fought in the area near the end of December.



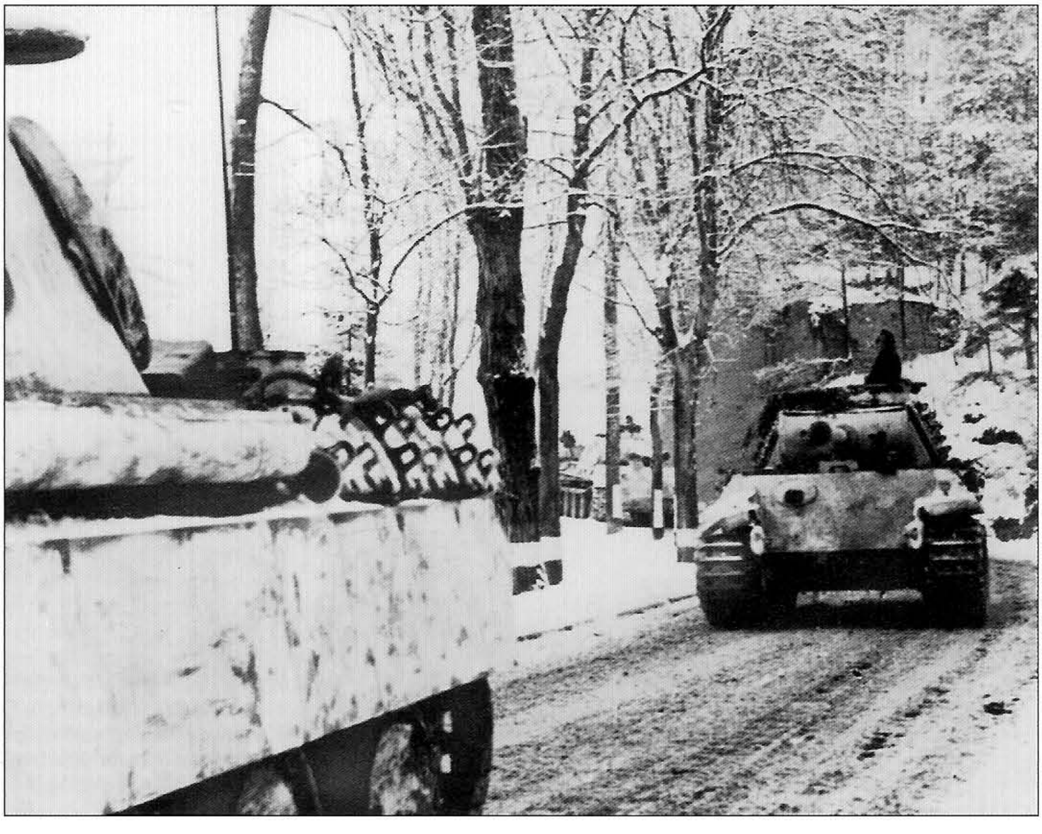
A Jeep, captured and being used by the Germans, destroyed by American mortar fire near Foy. After holding up the attack by 2.Panzer-Division on Noville, Task Force Desobry from CCB of the 10th Armored Division withdrew to the high ground around Foy on 21 December. Reinforced by the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, they were instrumental in delaying the progress of 2.Panzer-Division 24 hours, resulting in their defeat at Foy-Notre-Dame and Celles on 26 December.

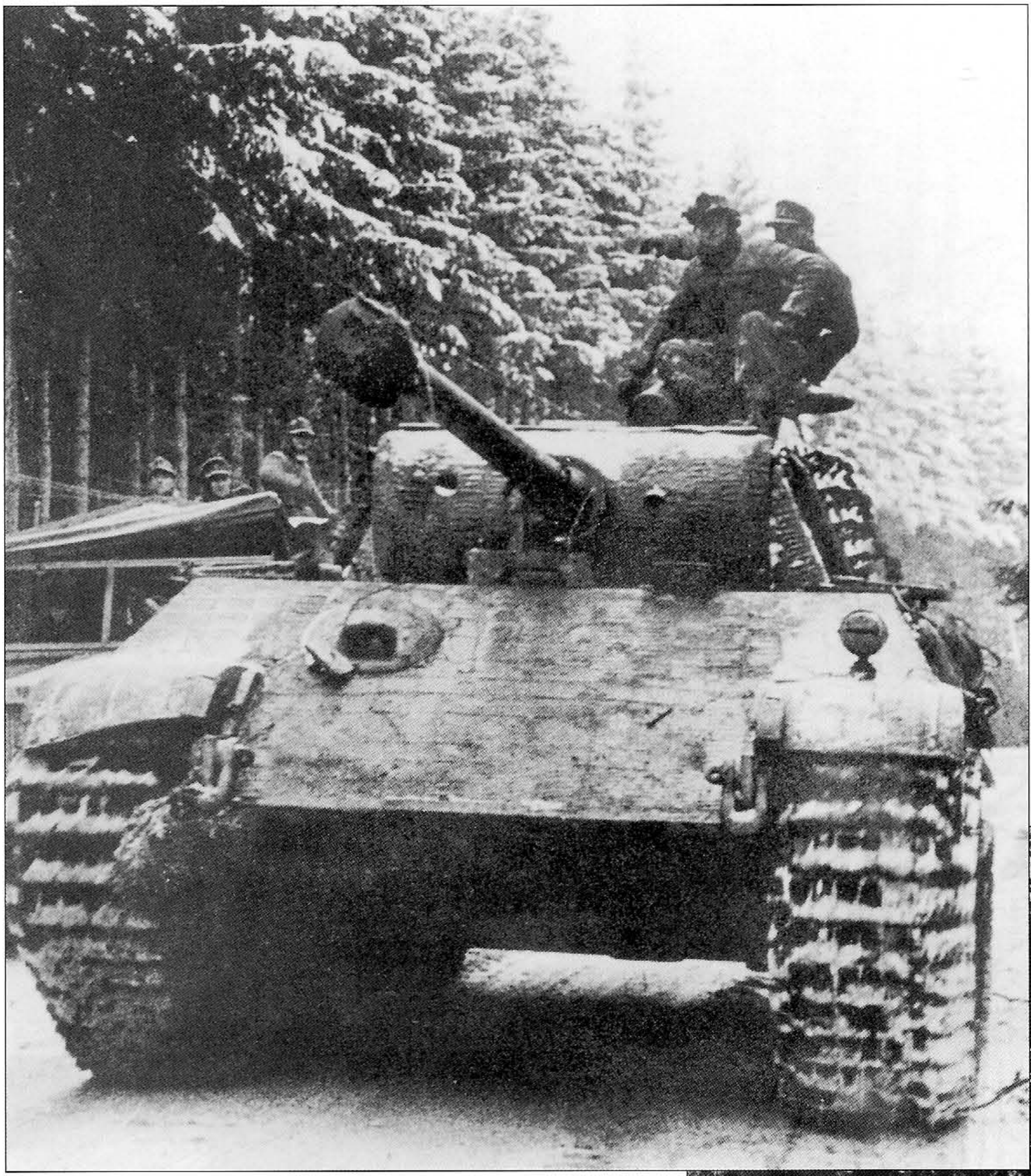


An Sd.Kfz.6 half-track prime mover towing the deadly dual purpose 8.8cm PaK43/41 anti-tank gun. The gun was provided with a dial sight that allowed it to be used a field gun although it was seldom used in this role. A little over 6.6 meters long and weighing 4380kg, it was a cumbersome weapon to maneuver efficiently in the field. It fired a 7.3kg. shell at a muzzle velocity of 1130 m/s and was capable of penetrating 153mm of armor plate at a range of 2000m.



A column of white winter camouflaged Panther Ausf.G on a snow covered, mountainous road in late December 1944. At the head of 2.Panzer-Division's advance towards Foy-Notre-Dame was Kampfgruppe von Böhm, led by Hauptmann von Böhm, the commander of Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 2. Supported by a company of Panthers from Panzer-Regiment 2, they were only 6-7km from the Meuse by the evening of 23 December. Earlier that afternoon, seeking to reinforce their advance, the divisional commander, Oberst Meinrad von Lauchert, formed another kampfgruppe around Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 304, under its newly appointed commander, Major Ernst von Cochenhausen. Following a different route through Celles, they caught up with von Böhm late that evening. The next day saw the 2nd Armored Division and British 3rd Royal Tank Regiment attack the spearheads supported by American and British fighter-bombers. Kampfgruppe von Böhm was overwhelmed on Christmas Day with most survivors being taken prisoner. Cut off, Kampfgruppe von Cochenhausen abandoned their vehicles and about 800 men escaped back to the German lines during the night. This was to be the furthest penetration by German forces during the offensive.

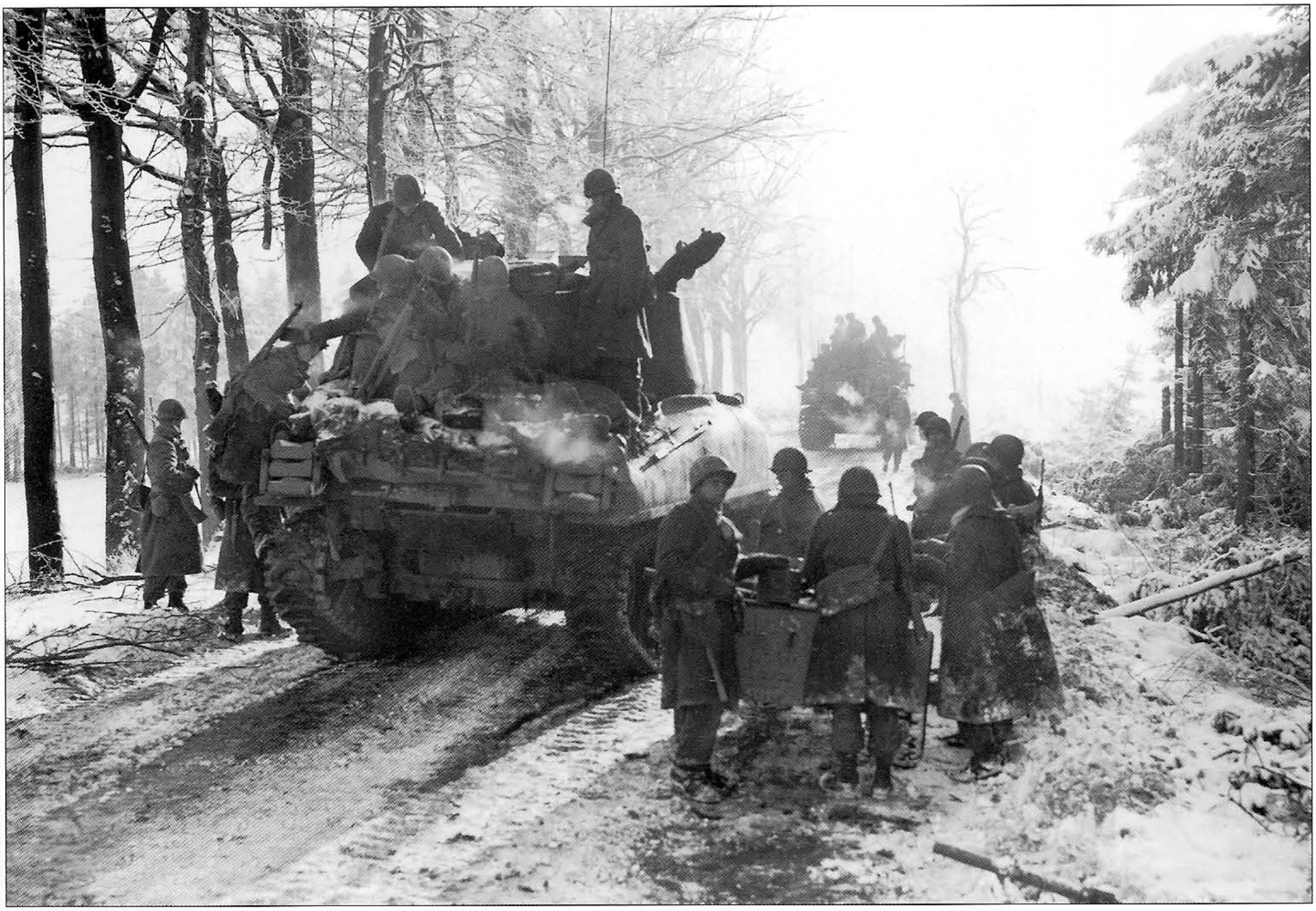




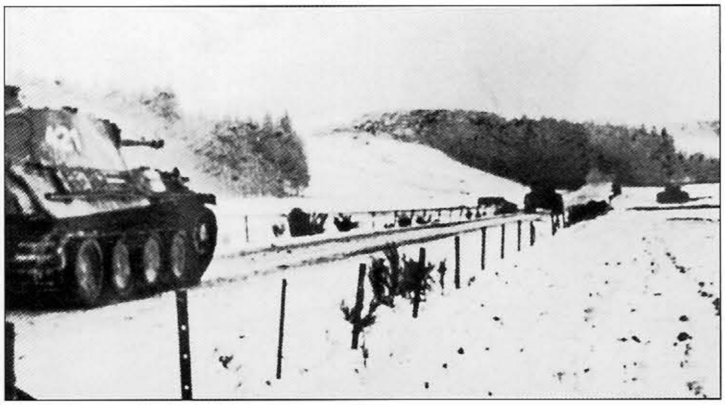
An early Panzerbefehlswagen Panther Ausf.G, still carrying its Zimmerit coating, passes a column of Schwerer Wehrmacht Schlepper half-tracked transport vehicles on a tree lined forest road. The outline of the star antenna can just be seen to the right of the commander, mounted in the normal vehicle radio antenna mount on the left side of the engine deck.

Sd.Kfz.250 half-tracks of 116.Panzer-Division litter the roadside in Amonines after being destroyed by Task Force Orr of 3rd Armored Division. The two half-tracks on the left are 'Neue' production vehicles while the one on the right is an 'Alte' production and is quite unusual in that it has been fitted with a 2cm autocannon.

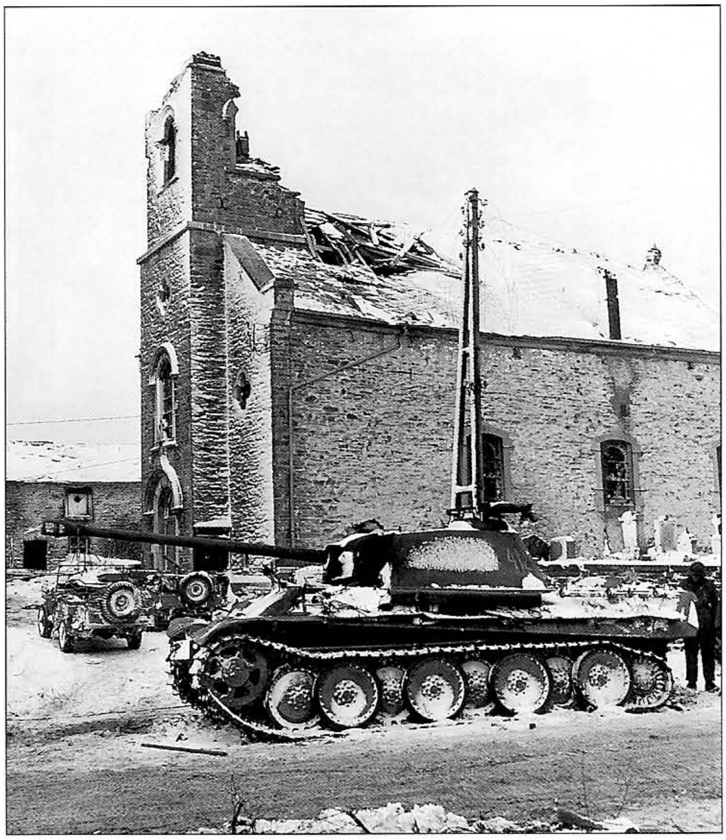
Panther crews warm themselves around a fire at night with their Panther Ausf.G concealed in the forest behind them. This would be a somewhat unusual occurrence as nightime did not signal the end of the day's fighting and during the offensive, operations were carried out around the clock.



After enjoying a hot meal, infantry climb aboard an M4A1(76)W from either the 32nd or 33rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Armored Division in late December 1944. By this time, the bulge had been contained and was slowly being reduced with elements of 3rd Armored Division operating in the area around Houffalize. In addition to the regulation bumper codes displayed on the rear of the Sherman is a small white shield with a dark colored cross painted on the right side.

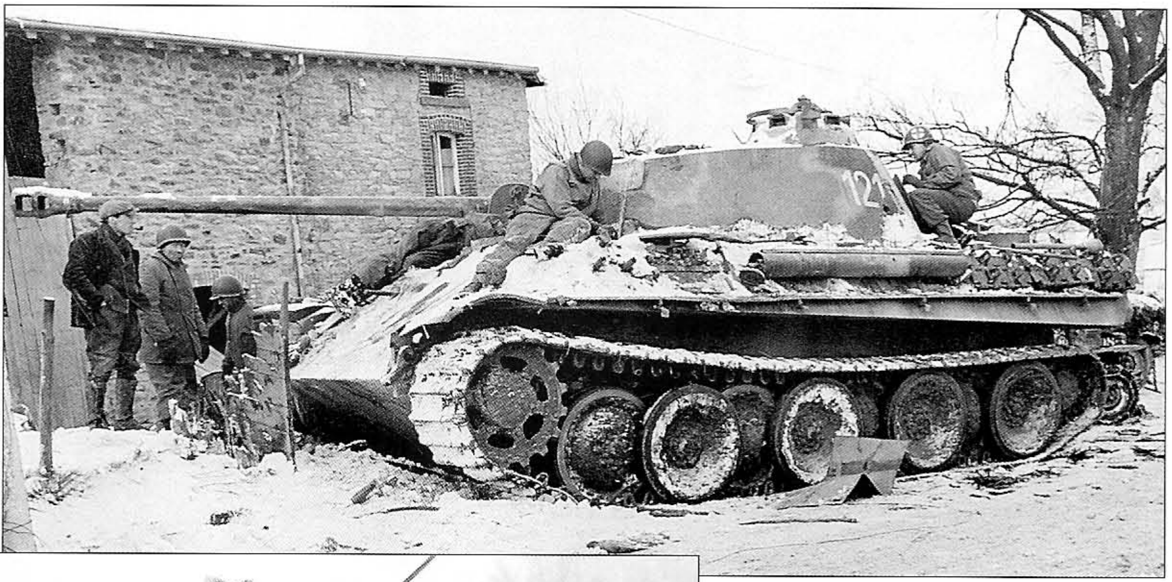


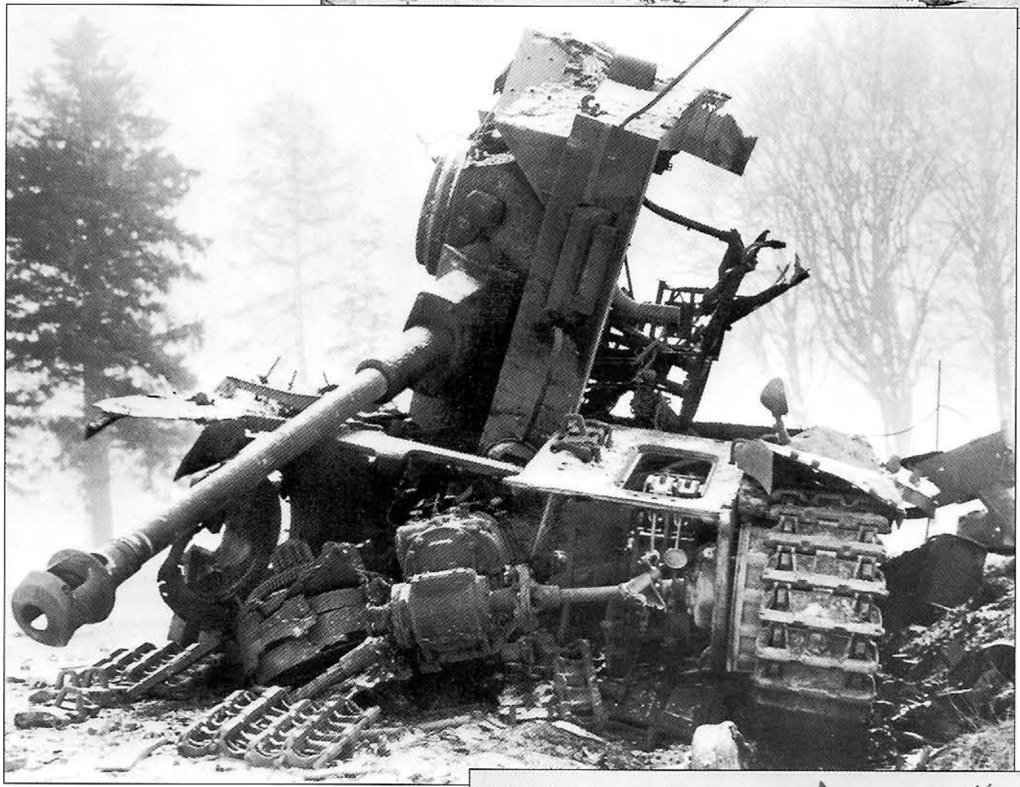
A column of Panthers travel down a snow covered road in late December. Often identified as Panthers from 116.Panzer-Division, it is more likely they are from 9.SS-Panzer-Division as the size, color, location and style of the tactical numbers match other photos known to be from that division. Originally employed with 2.SS-Panzer-Korps on the northern edge of the offensive in the Malmédy area, it was transferred south to the Recht-Poteau area in support of Kampfgruppe Hansen.



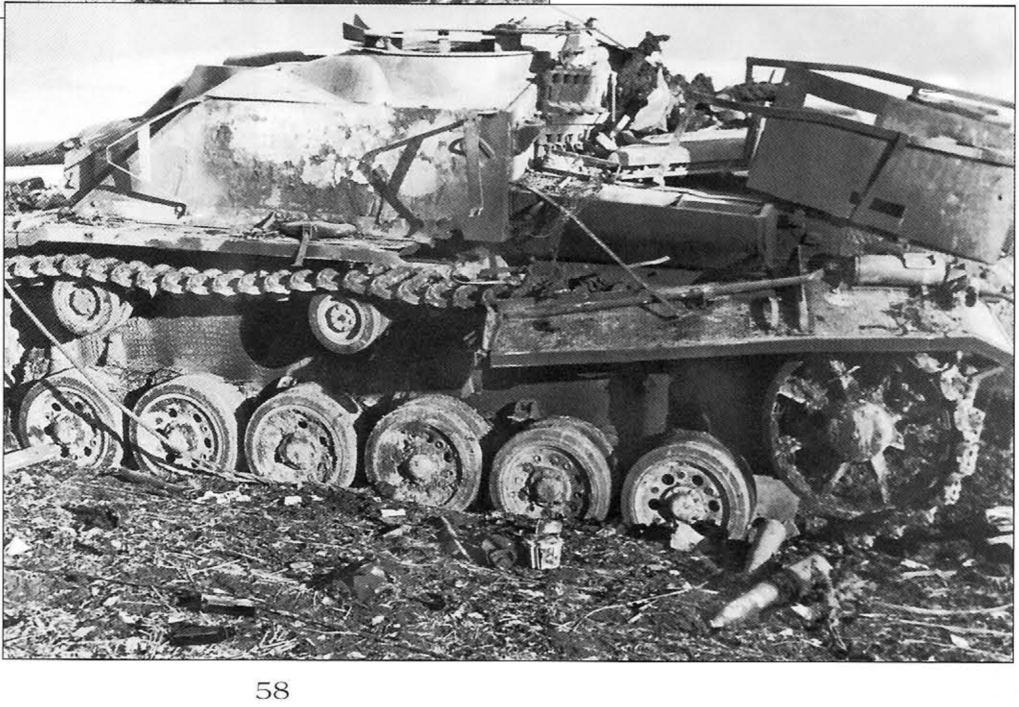
Often mistakenly identified as belonging to 9.Panzer-Division, this Panther Ausf.G from SS-Pz.Rgt.9, 9.SS-Panzer-Division lies next to the village church in Sterpigny, Belgium after being knocked out by tank destroyers of the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion in late January 1945. During the Ardennes Offensive, 9.Panzer-Division was only equipped with Panthers in the II.Abteilung while 9.SS-Panzer-Division was equipped with Panthers in the I.Abteilung. The three digit tactical number '412', painted in white on the rear side of the turret, provides the evidence.

Another Panther Ausf.G from 9.SS-Panzer-Division knocked out at Langlir on 13 January 1945. The three digit tactical number '121' is painted in white.

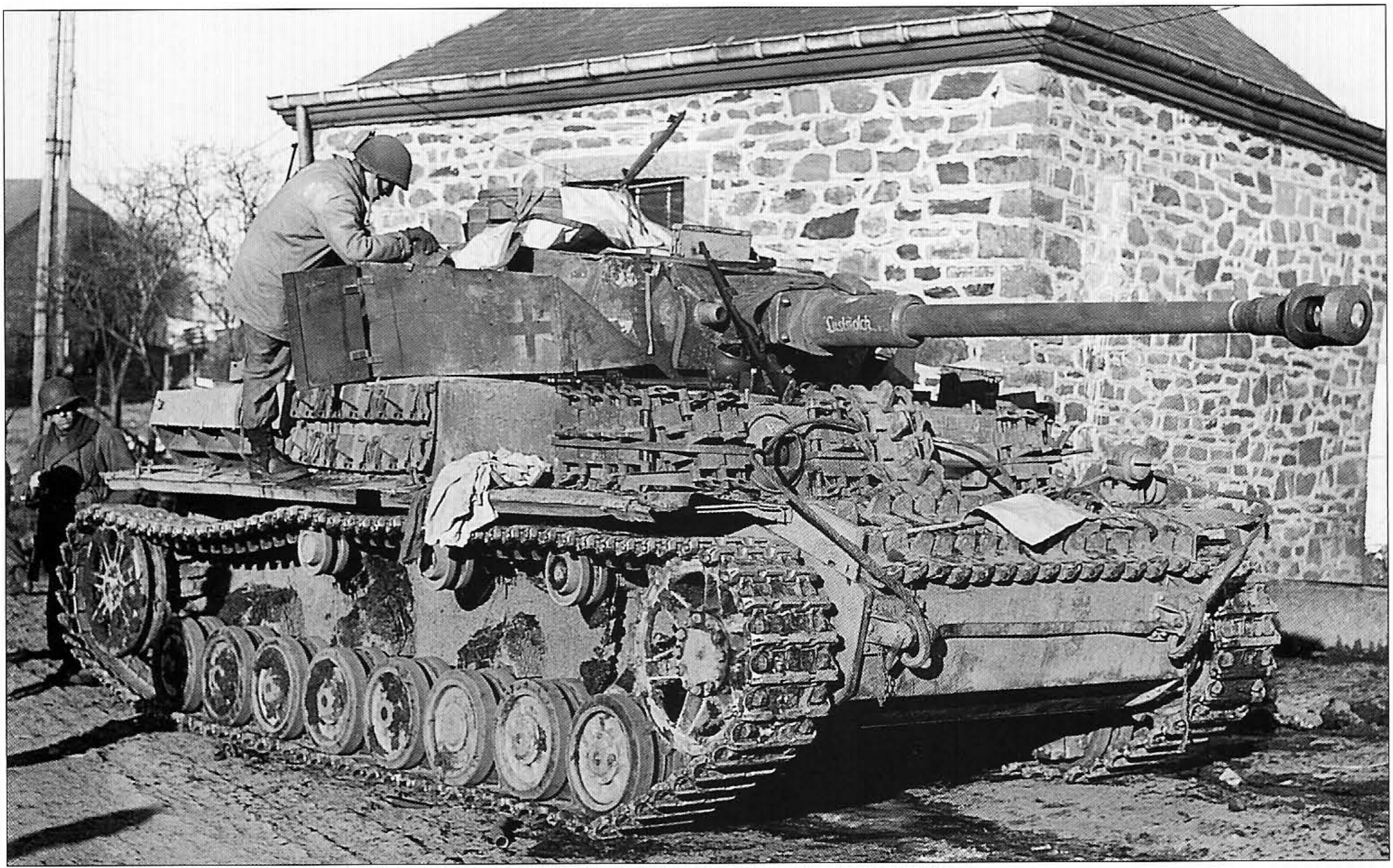




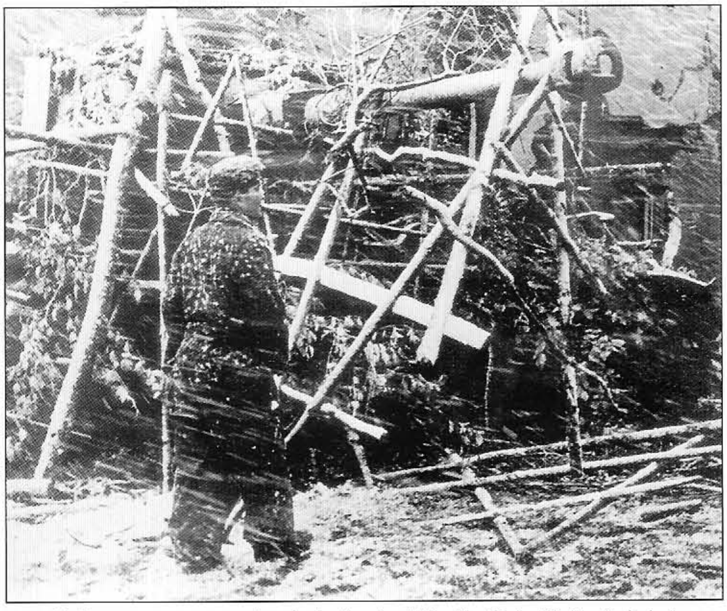
A barely recognizable Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J from 15.Panzer-Grenadier-Division knocked out near Champs by paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division on Christmas Day. Kampfgruppe Maucke with Pz.Kpfw.IVs and StuG.IIIs from Panzer-Abteilung 115, launched a surprise attack against the 327th Glider Regiment's lines while Grenadier-Regiment 77 attacked the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment at Champs on Christmas morning. A fierce battle ensued with bazooka fire coming in from every direction resulting in almost 200 casualties and the loss of 18 tanks.



Another casualty from Kampfgruppe Maucke, this StuG.III Ausf.G lies on the road from Champs to Hemroulle where it was knocked out by men from Lieutenant-Colonel Steve Chappuis' 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment on Christmas Day, after advancing to within 100 yards of his command post. There are a number of late features on the StuG.III including the 'Topfblende' cast gun mantlet and deflector in front of the cupola, but the step in the mudguard indicates it was one of those produced on the chassis of a Pz.Kpfw.III. There is evidence of the waffle pattern Zimmerit coating on the lower hull and engine deck but it appears most has been completely burned off the fighting compartment.

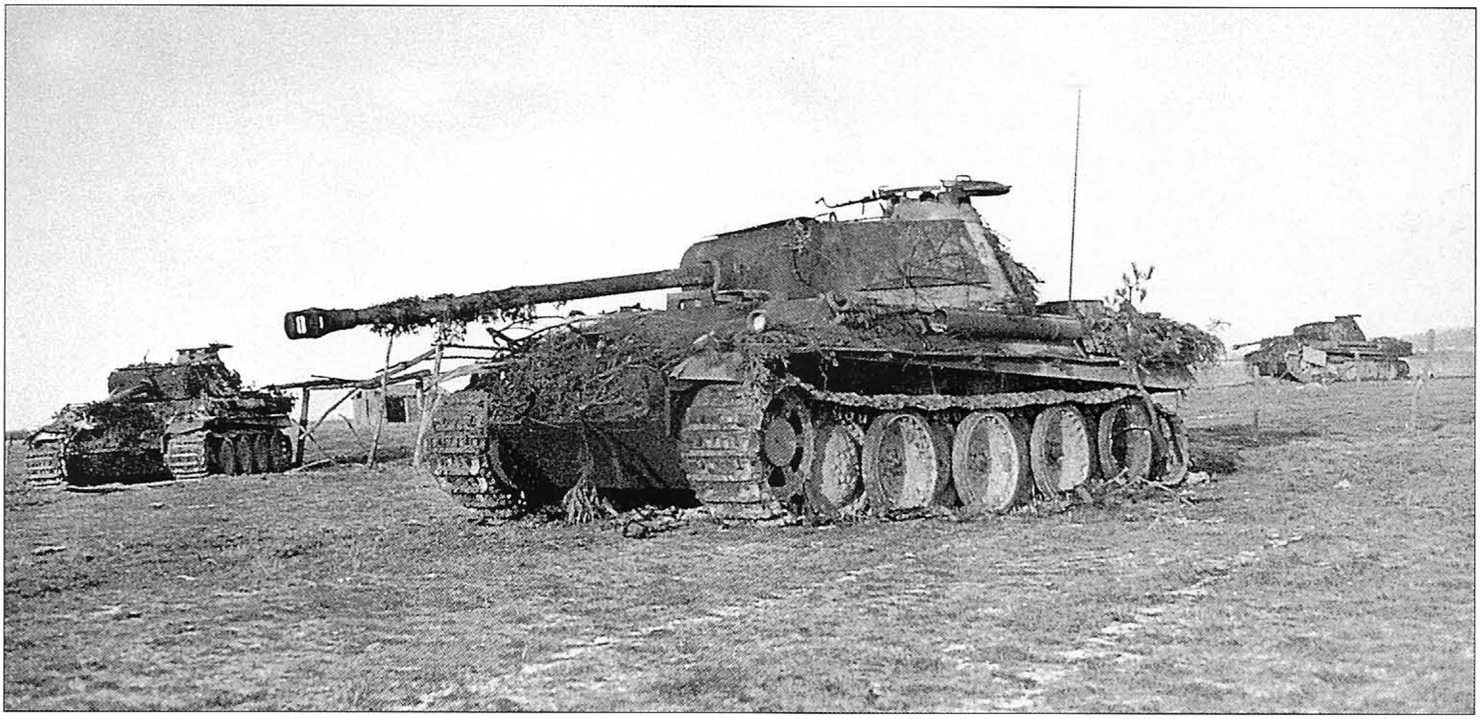


This Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J from Kampfgruppe Maucke was knocked out by men from the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment in Champs on 26 December 1944. It was produced in late September 1944 after the discontinuation of Zimmerit but before the introduction of the swivel cupola hatch in October 1944. One of the steel return rollers has been lost although no damage is apparent to explain why. The name 'Lustmolch' (sex fiend) is painted on the recuperator housing and one kill ring has been painted on the gun barrel just behind the muzzle brake.

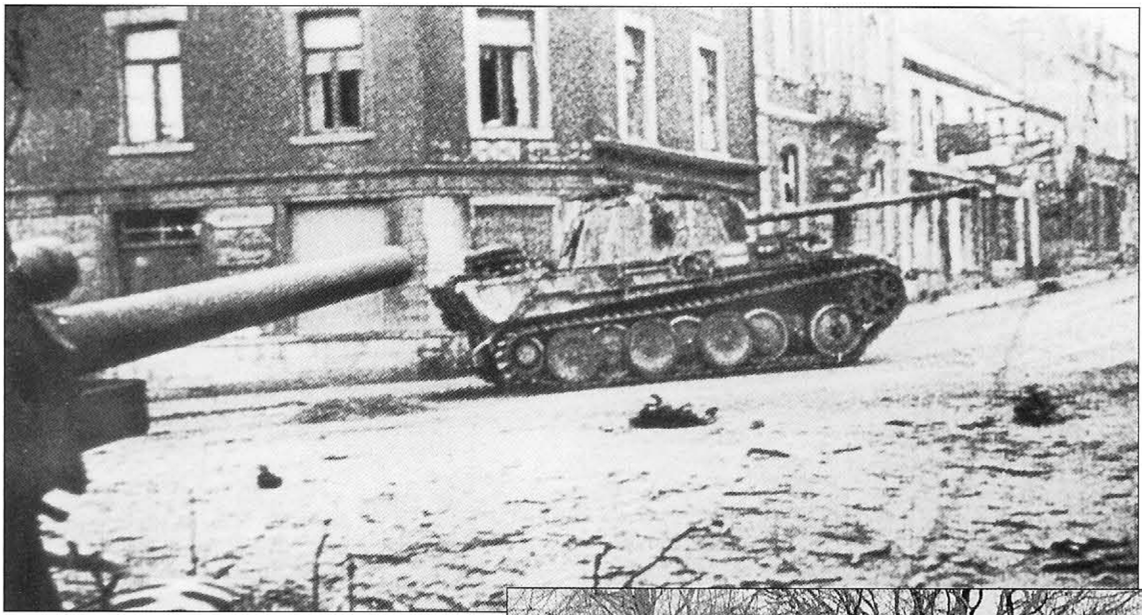


A Panzer crewman stands in front of his Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf. J during a snow storm. The crew has gone to great lengths to camouflage their vehicle with branches and small trees.

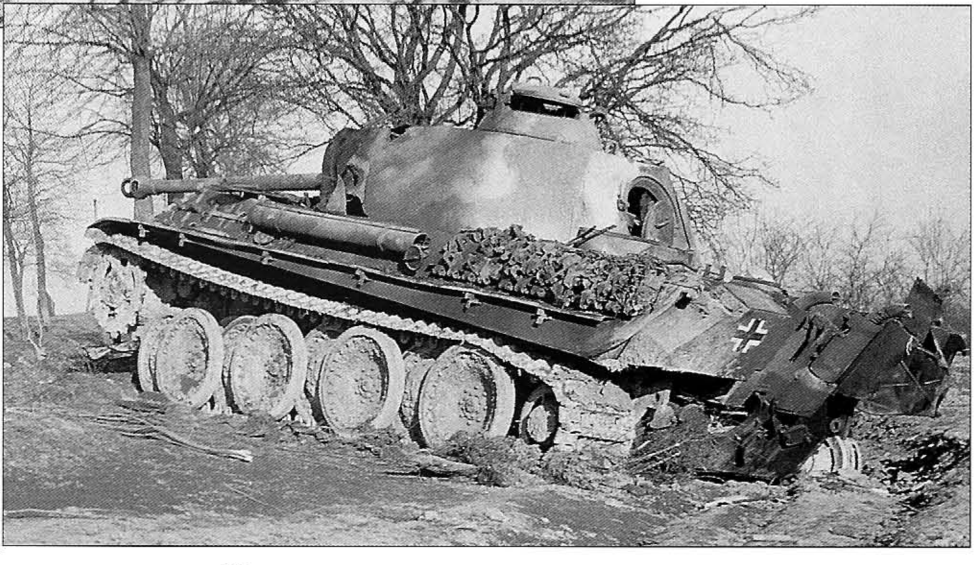
A Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J from Pz.Abt.115, 15.Panzer-Grenadier-Division during a snow storm. On 9 December, the reported strength of Pz.Abt.115 was one company of 14 Pz.Kpfw.IVs and two companies, each with 15 StuG.IIIs plus 2 Panzerbefehlswagen III and 2 Flakpanzer IV Möbelwagen. After the battle at Bastogne, they fought in the Langlir area northeast of Houffalize, where the U.S. First and Third Armies linked up in mid-January, 1945.



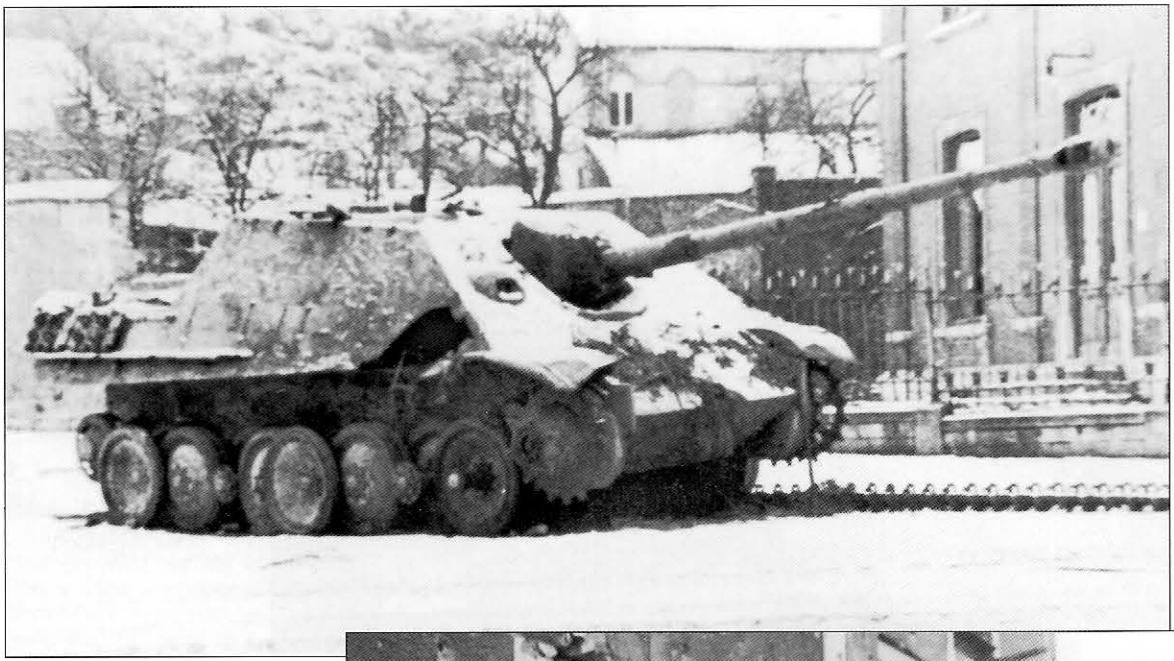
Three Panthers from Panzer-Regiment 33, 9.Panzer-Division rest in a field near Humain after being pushed out of the village on 28 December by 2nd Armored Division. Designated one of the OKW reserve divisions at the start of the offensive, they were transferred to XLVII.Panzer-Korps and assigned to support the breakthrough of 2.Panzer-Division towards Celles. Reassigned to LVIII.Panzer-Korps, they fought in the Eifel area until they were withdrawn on 14 January 1945.



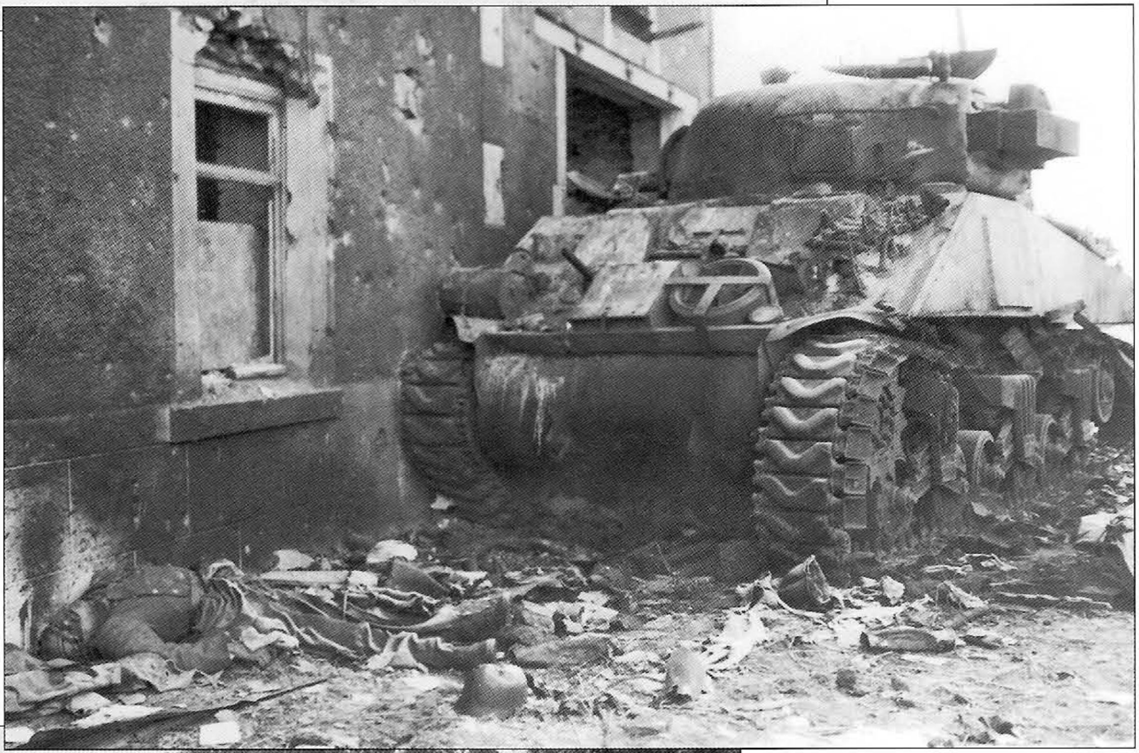
A Panther Ausf.G from Panzer-Lehr-Division advances past an abandoned American 3-inch anti-tank gun from the 84th Infantry Division in the town of Rochefort. Panzer-Lehr-Regiment 130 was equipped with 30 Panthers in the 6. and 8.Kompanies and 27 Pz.Kpfw.IV in the 5. and 7.Kompanies of its II.Abteilung for the offensive. To replace the missing I.Abteilung, it was assigned schwere-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 559 with 15 Jagdpanthers and StuG.IIIs. The only markings displayed are a prominent Balkenkreuz on the side of the turret along with one on the left rear stowage bin.



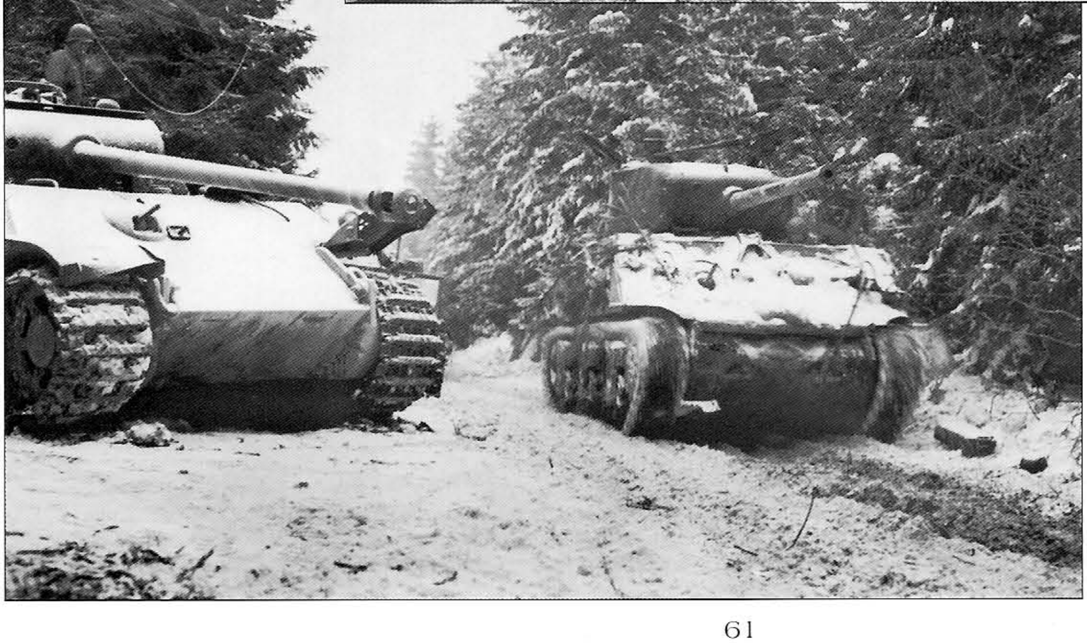
This Panther Ausf.G from Panzer-Lehr-Division was knocked out near Buissonville during the fighting there after Christmas. There are two penetrations in the side of the turret just behind the mantlet that have cracked the 45mm thick armor. It is also fitted with the raised fan cover for the crew compartment heater.



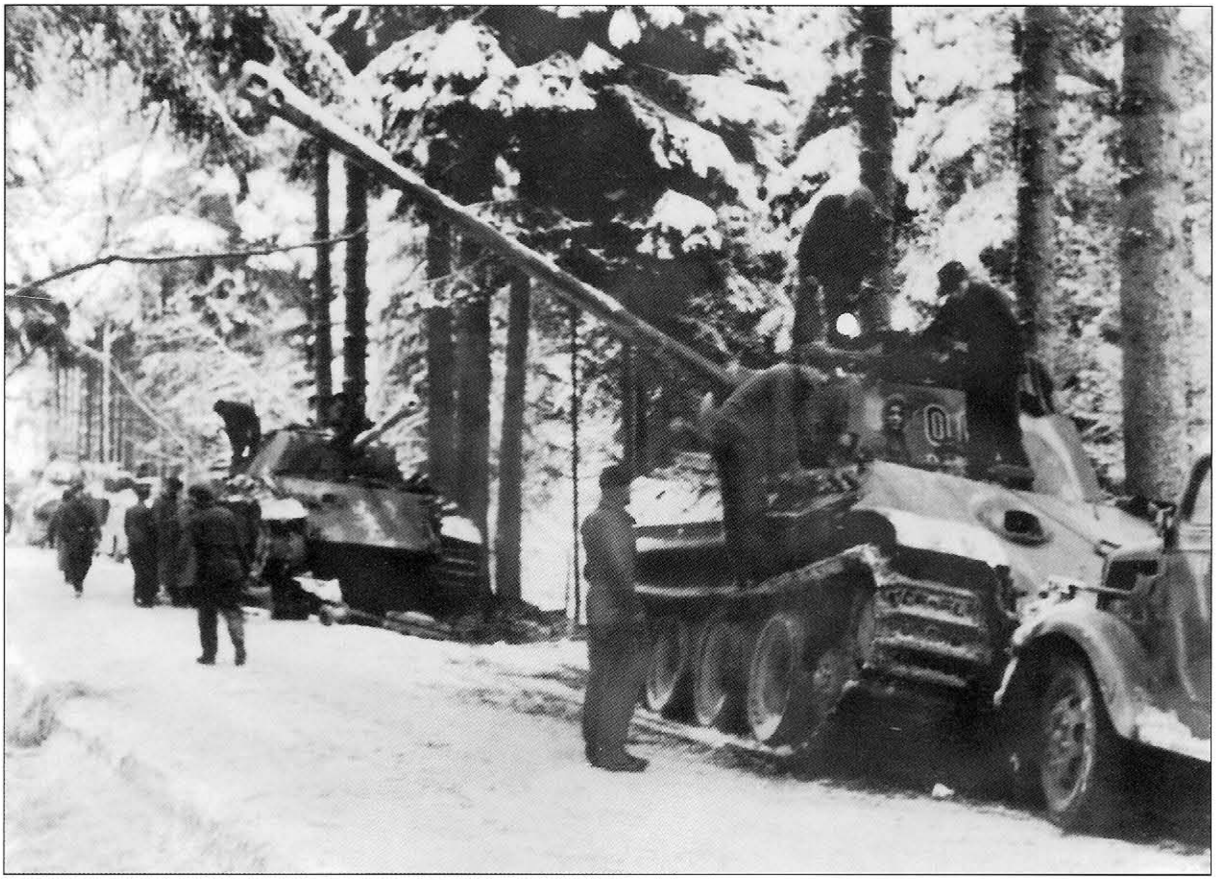
A Jagdpanther of schwere-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 559 sits destroyed in Rochefort on the road south to Han-sur-Lesse. The 84th Infantry Division was forced to withdraw from the town after Panzer-Lehr-Division attacked during the early morning hours of 24 December. However, the next day, counter-attacks by the Americans in the Humain area, supported by heavy artillery barrages, pushed them back south. Rochefort would mark the furthest advance of Panzer-Lehr-Division.



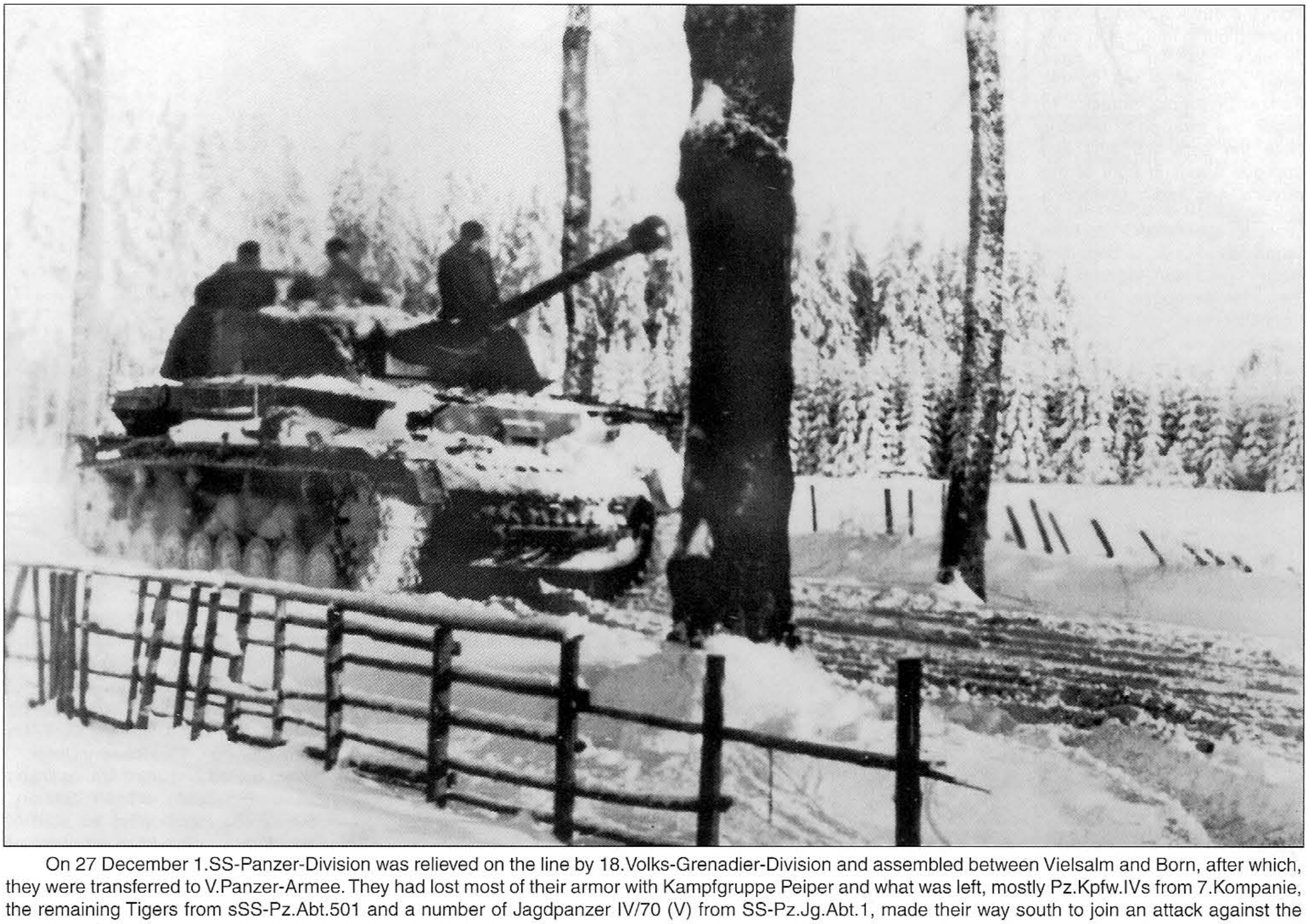
The price of war – a young German soldier lies dead in front of an early M4 Sherman from the 6th Armored Division knocked out in Mageret in early January 1945. It may have been a victim of the 12.SS-Panzer-Divisions attack to regain the town on 4 January. Note the early 47° hull and applique armor in front of the driver's and radio operator's positions.



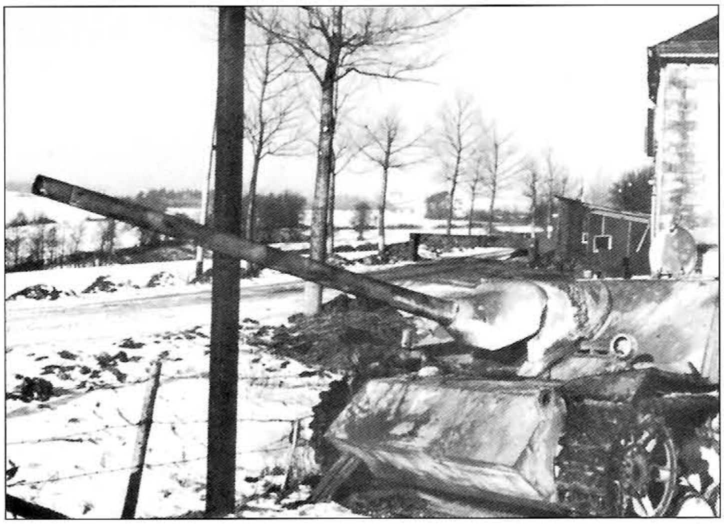
An M4A3(76)W passes a knocked out Panther on a forest track near Bovigny on 17 January 1945. Markings on the Sherman, though not clear in this censored photo, show it is the 14th tank in Company C, 774th Tank Battalion, 83rd Infantry Division. The U.S. First and Third Armies linked up at Houffalize on 16 January, exactly one month after the start of the offensive. The slow progress of the northern and southern flanks and skillful resistance of the grenadiers allowed the Germans to withdraw avoiding a possible envelopment.



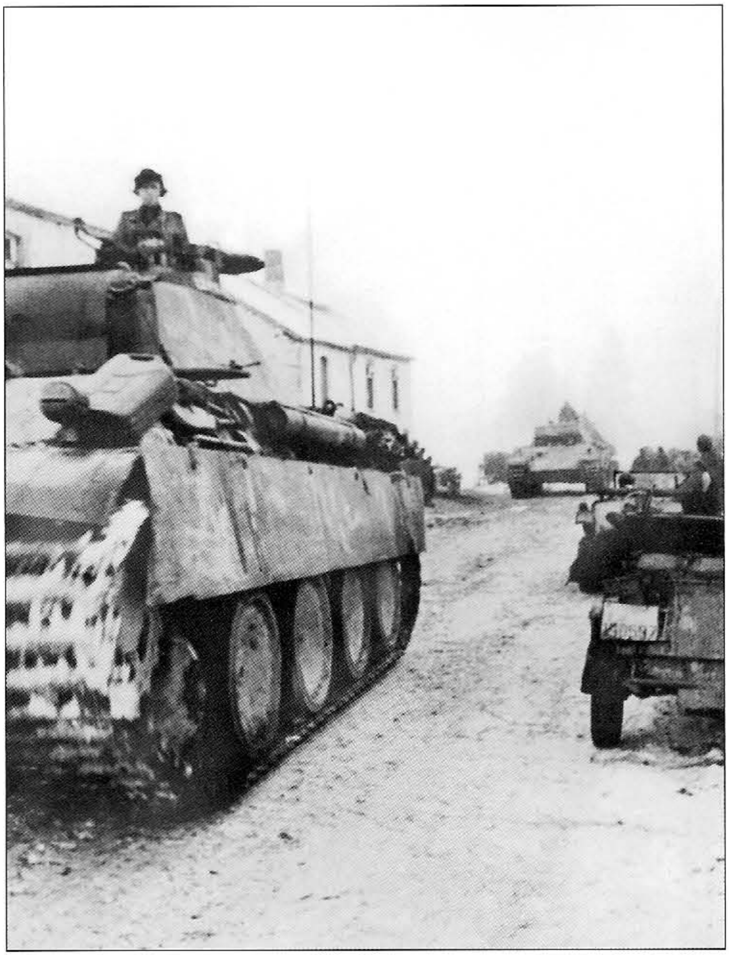
Several Panther Ausf.G of an unidentified SS-Panzer-Division, undergoing maintenance in a heavily forested area in early January 1945. As none of the divisions had a 9th company, this Panther likely belongs to the headquarters staff company.



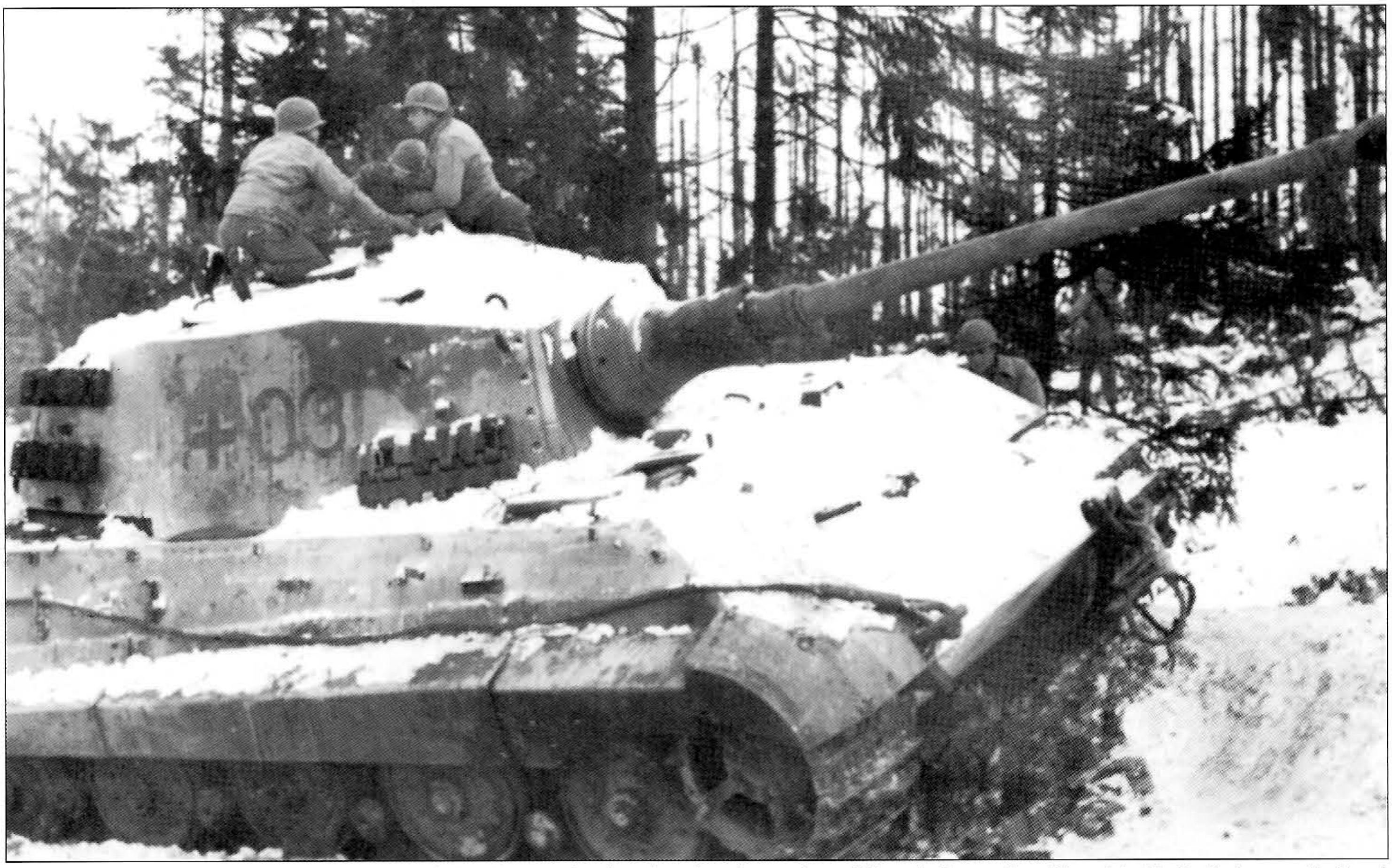
On 27 December 1.SS-Panzer-Division was relieved on the line by 18.Volks-Grenadier-Division and assembled between Vielsalm and Born, after which, they were transferred to V.Panzer-Armee. They had lost most of their armor with Kampfgruppe Peiper and what was left, mostly Pz.Kpfw.IVs from 7.Kompanie, the remaining Tigers from sSS-Pz.Abt.501 and a number of Jagdpanzer IV/70 (V) from SS-Pz.Jg.Abt.1, made their way south to join an attack against the Bastogne Corridor directed at Assenois. Here, a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J races down a snowy road on its way south.



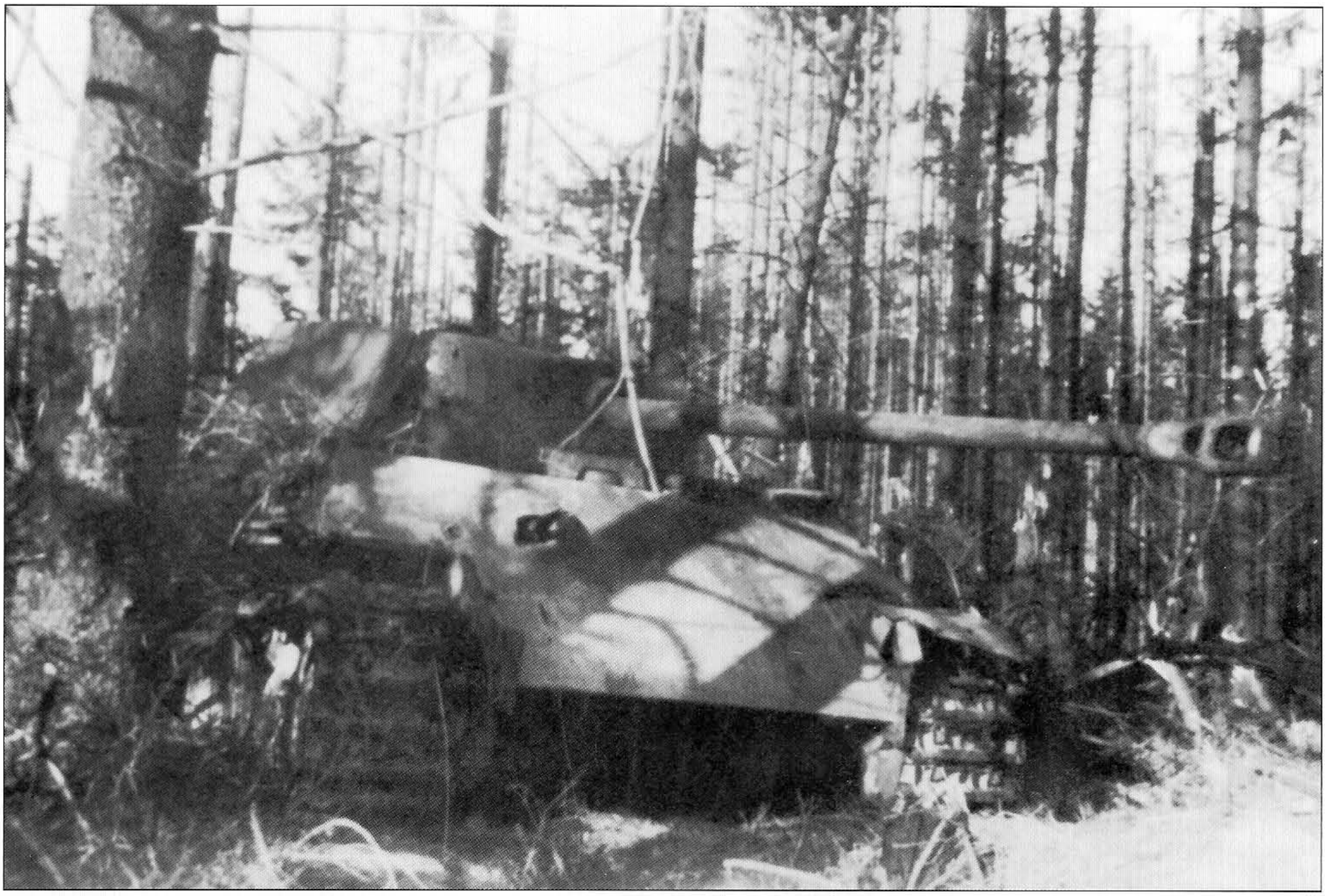
A Jagdpanzer IV/70 (V), probably from SS-Pz.Jg.Abt.1, sits beside the Bastogne-Wiltz highway on the border between Belgium and Luxembourg. This is a late production vehicle with resilient steel wheels on the front two stations and three steel return rollers. The gun travel lock, normally fitted to the glacis plate, appears to have been torn away. Remnants of an 'ambush' camouflage scheme can be seen on the upper fighting compartment and open hatch.



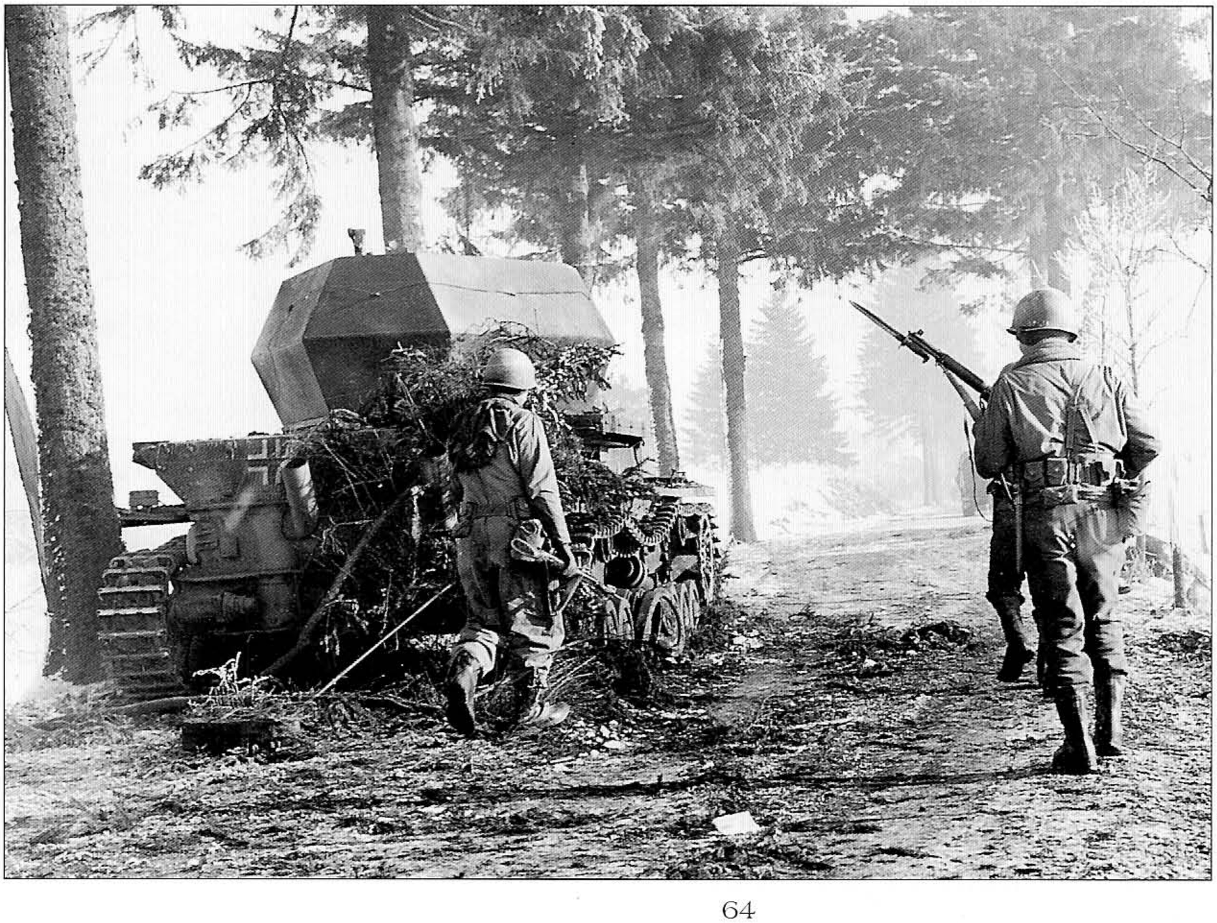
Two of the few remaining Panther Ausf.G available to 1.SS-Panzer-Division make their way south to join V.Panzer-Armee past a Kübelwagen and Schwimmwagen parked alongside the road. Although no national or tactical markings are visible, there appears to be a name painted on the cupola that may be 'Ursula'.



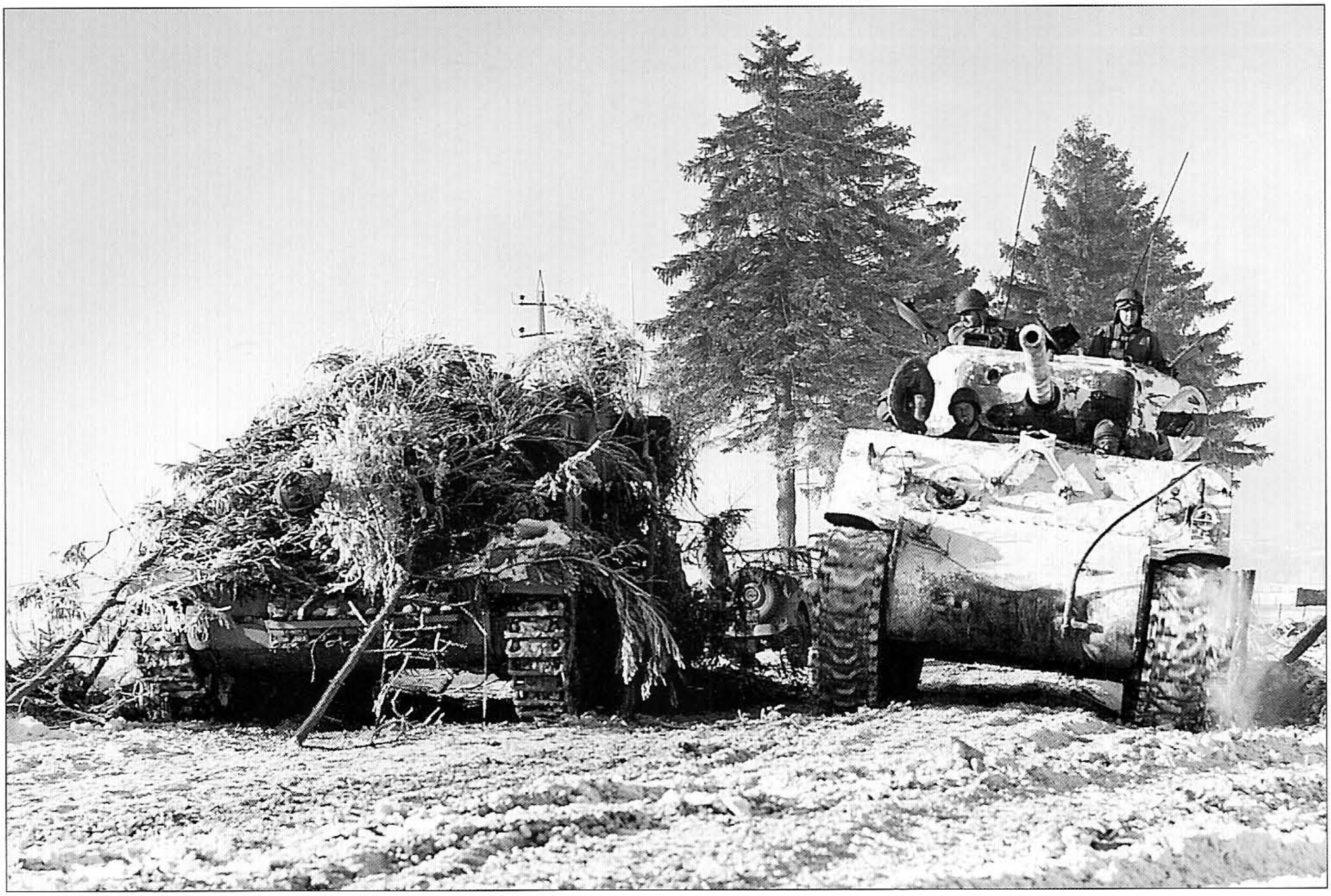
A Tiger II from the battalion headquarters of s.Pz.Abt.506 sits abandoned on the road near Villers-la-Bonne-Eau. It is painted in the factory applied hard edge camouflage scheme of green and dark yellow over the red primer base. Small spots of color have been added to the base colors to complete the 'ambush' pattern. The tactical number '03' appears to be painted in solid black in front of the standard Balkenkreuz.



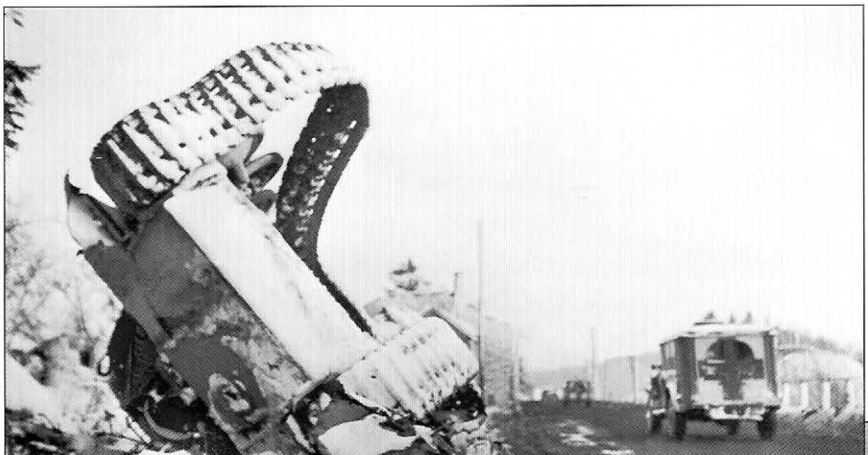
The main attack to cut the corridor was made by 1.SS-Panzer-Division through Lutrebois in the early morning hours of 30 December, supported by 167.Volks-Grenadier-Division and Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 14. Lutrebois was captured but the attackers were stopped 200m short of the road. This Panther Ausf.G, one of the few remaining to 1.SS-Panzer-Division, was knocked out beside the road from Lutrebois to Lutremange.



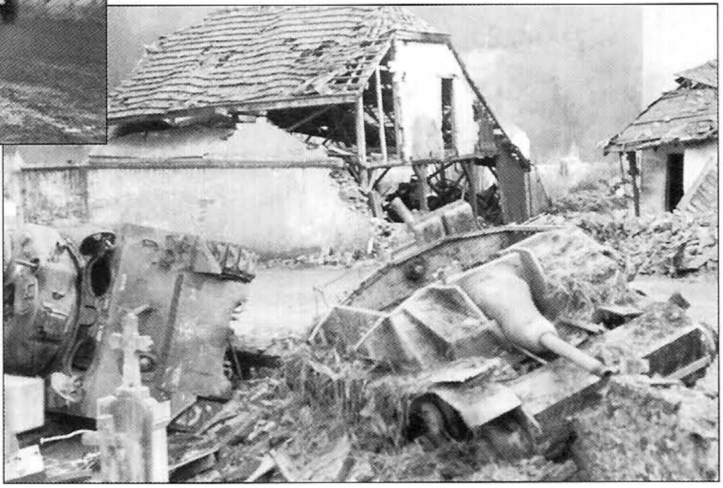
A destroyed Flakpanzer IV Wirbelwind sits on the road near Compogne, north of Bastogne, on 15 January 1945. The Flammentöter flame suppressing exhaust pipes show this vehicle was built on a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J chassis. The impact of the round that knocked out this vehicle has blown off one of the four steel return rollers and destroyed two roadwheels.



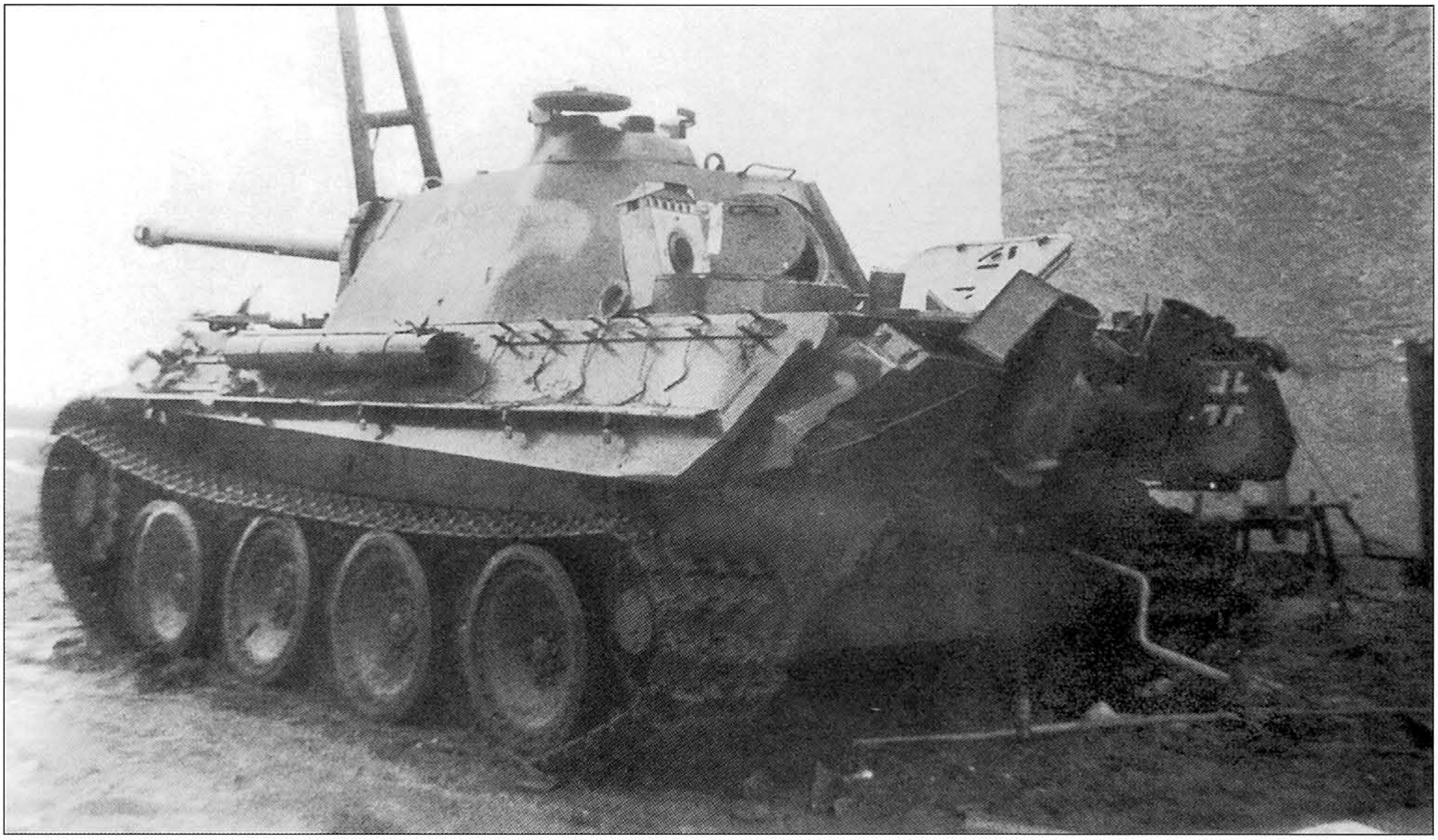
A heavily camouflaged Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.J sits abandoned on the road to Houffalize north of Bastogne on 15 January 1945. The M4A3 (76)W Sherman is from the 42nd Tank Battalion of the 11th Armored Division.



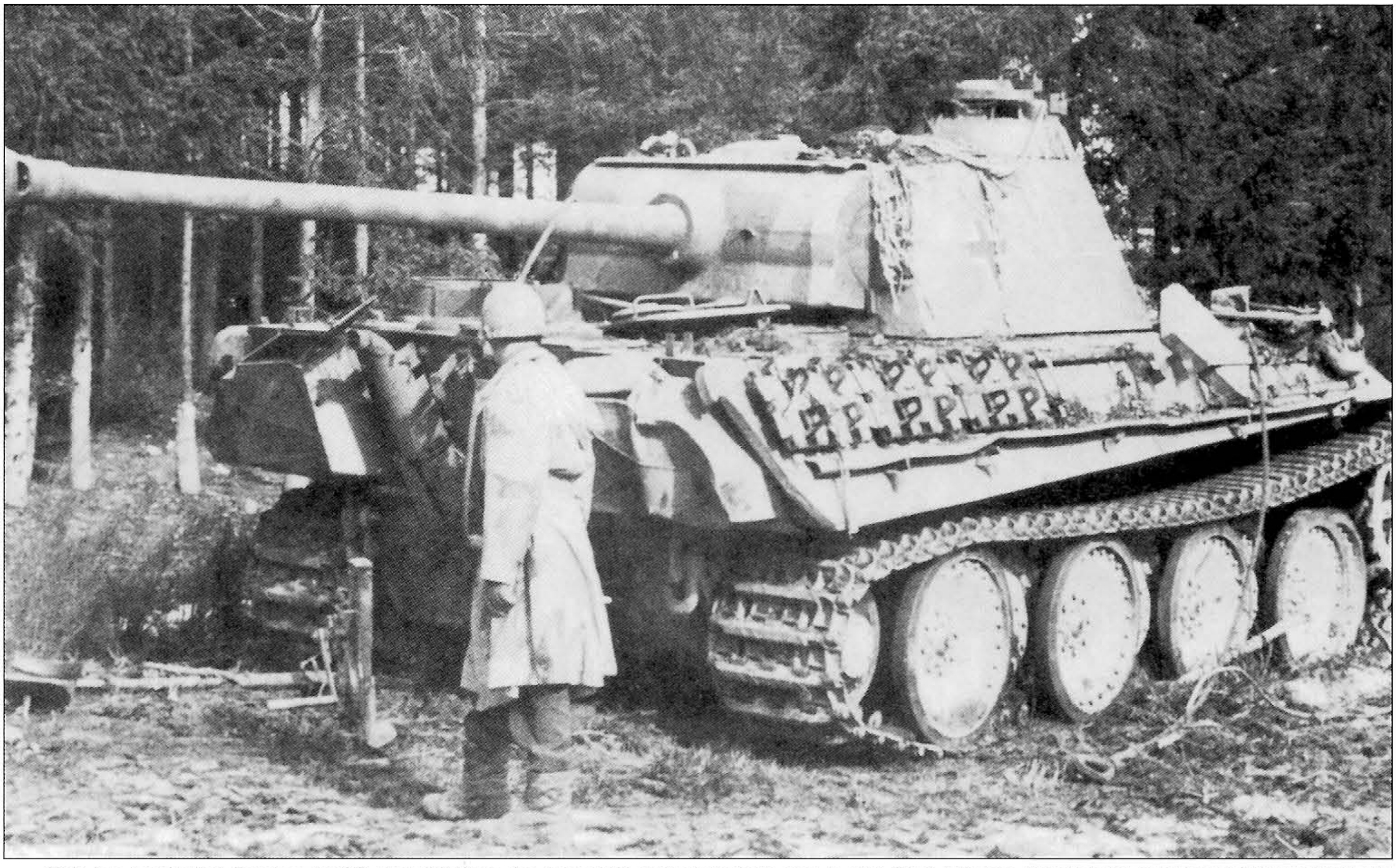
Two American ambulances pass a knocked out Panther Ausf.G from an unidentified Panzer-Division bulldozed off the side of the road. By 28 January, the Germans had been pushed back to their start line all along the front. The battle was officially over.



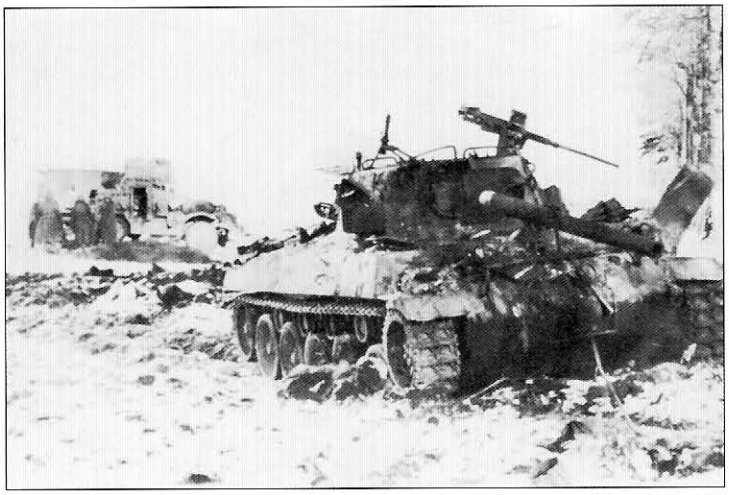
A StuG.III from 2.Panzer-Division lies on the road through Clervaux, Luxembourg in February 1945. It was abandoned during the German withdrawal from the Ardennes unlike the M4A3 behind it from Company A of the 707th Tank Battalion, which was destroyed during the opening attack in December.



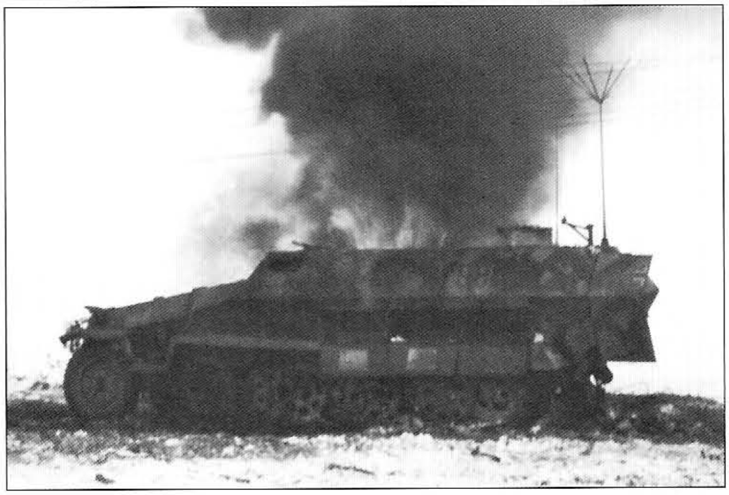
A new Panther Ausf.G, possibly from 9.Panzer-Division, sits abandoned in Clervaux, Luxembourg, the victim of a mechanical breakdown. This late production vehicle is fitted with the chin mantlet, Flammvernichter flame suppressing exhausts, raised fan cover for the crew compartment heater and new, larger diameter self-cleaning cast idler wheels. The three digit tactical number '301' is painted in a white stenciled outline on the sides of the turret and in solid white on the rear of the turret.



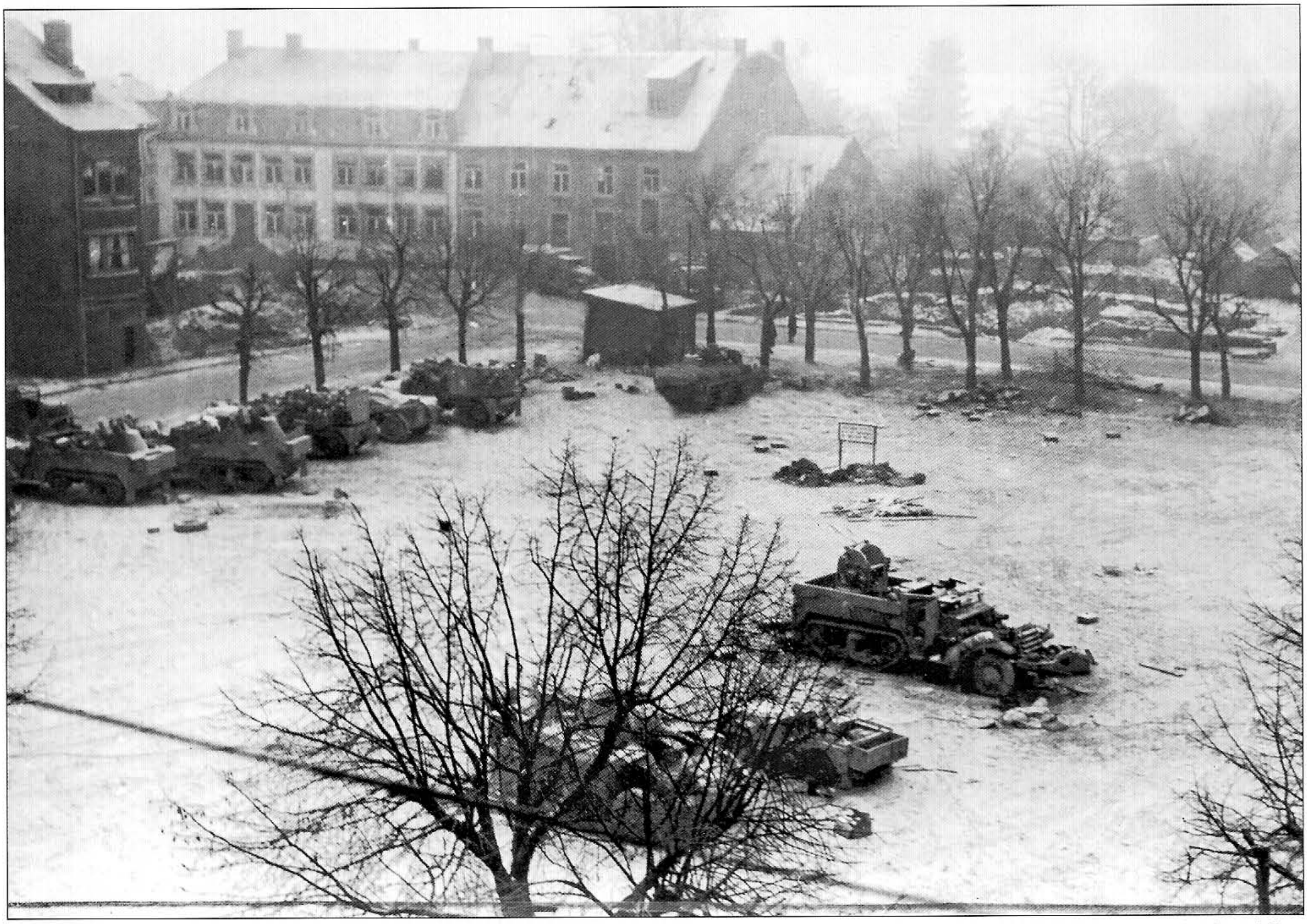
This late production Panther Ausf.G, possibly from the same unit as the previous one, is also fitted with the chin mantlet and raised fan cover but still retains the earlier exhaust pipes and earlier idler. Unusually, it has a Balkenkreuz painted on the side of the turret along with the three digit tactical number '302' in a white stenciled outline.



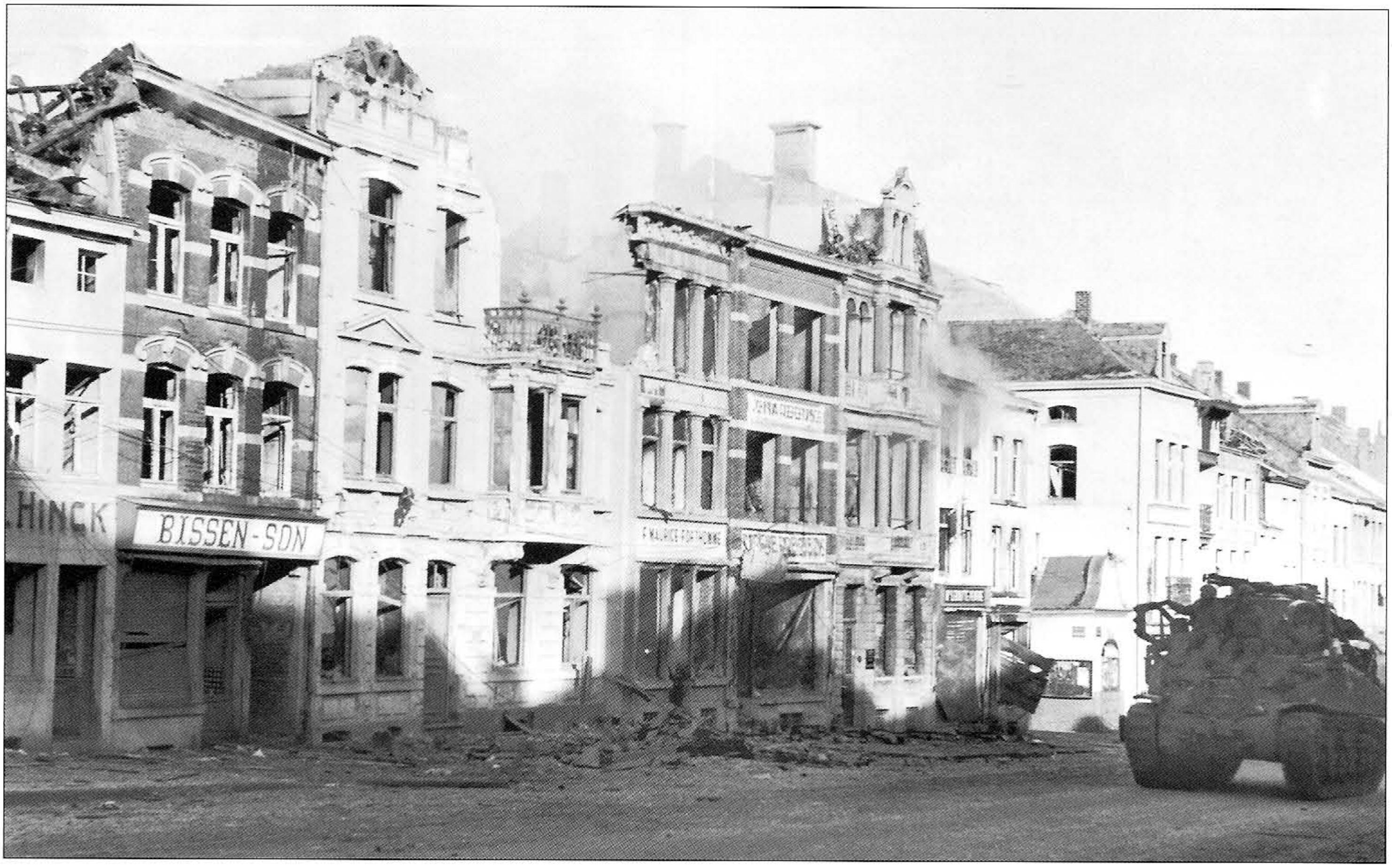
An M18 tank destroyer from the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 4th Armored Division, destroyed by German artillery fire near Sibret. By mid-afternoon on 26 December, CCR from the 4th Armored Division was at Clochimont, a few kilometers south of Bastogne. A decision was made to make a straight dash for the town through Assenois as it was felt Sibret would be more strongly defended. Led by 1st Lt.Charles Boggess in his M4A3(76)W Sherman nicknamed 'Cobra King', the column sped through the German defenders at Assenois and by 5:00 p.m., contact with the 326th Engineers, 101st Airborne Division had been made. The ring around Bastogne has been broken.



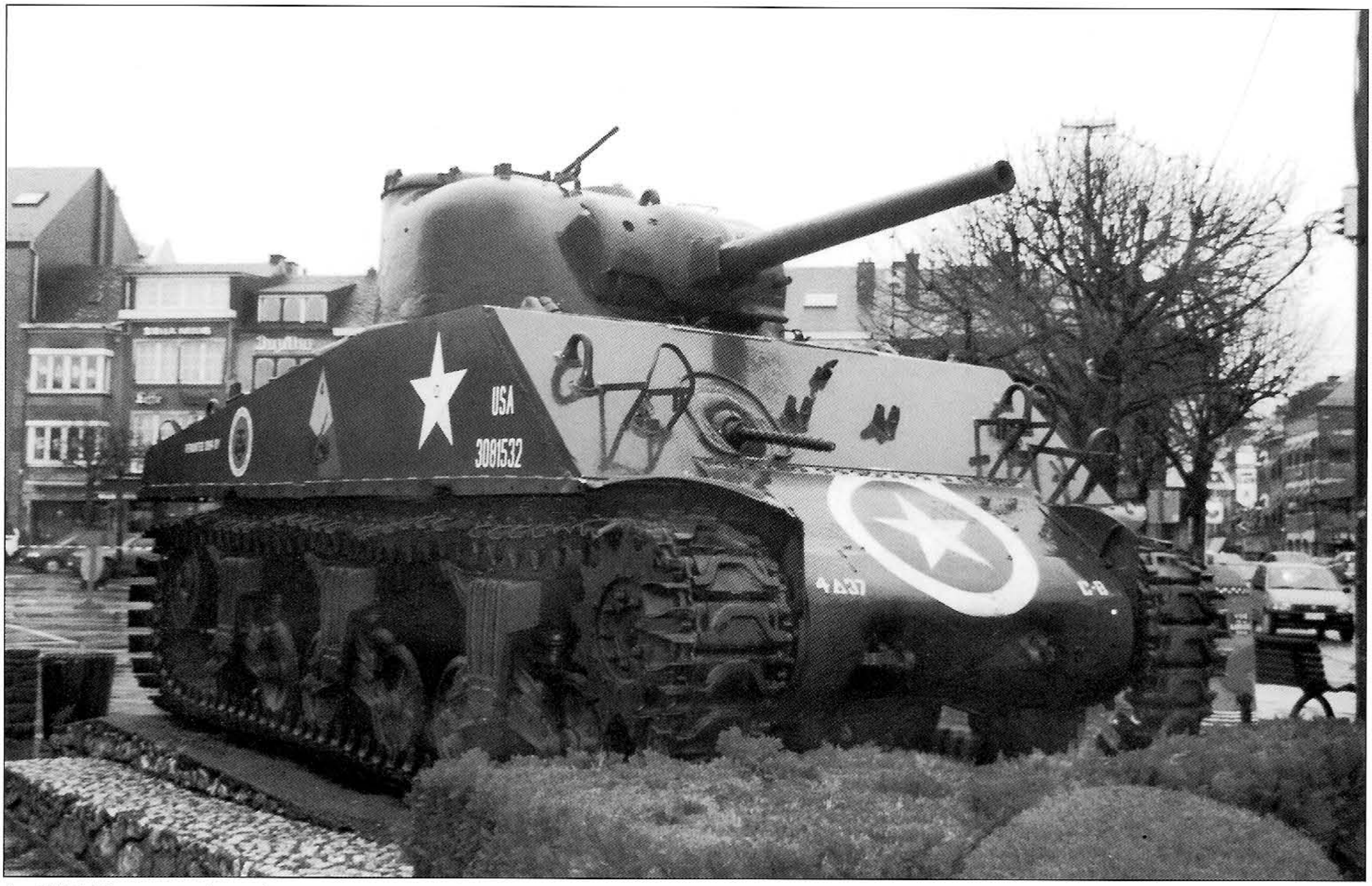
An Sd.Kfz.251/6 Ausf.C command half-track from Panzer-Lehr-Division burns near Jodenville in late December 1944. U.S. combat engineers apparently set it on fire after it was abandoned during the German withdrawal.



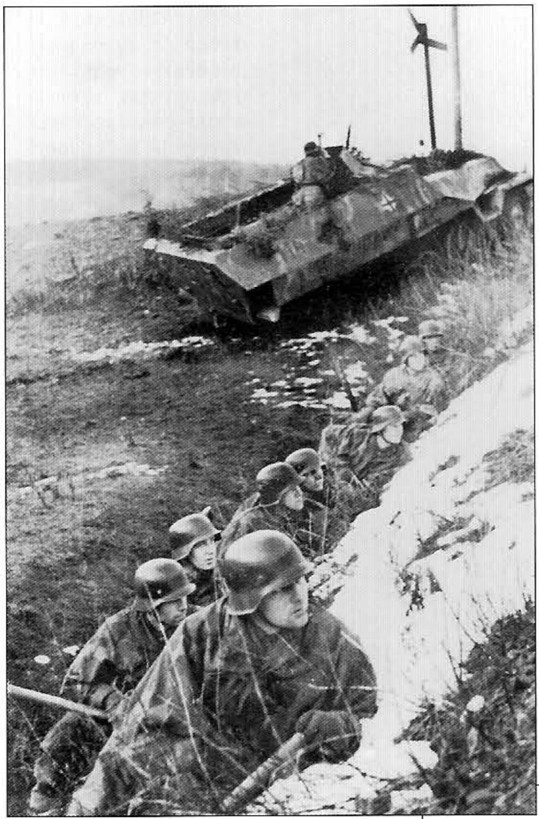
The main town square, now called Place McAuliffe, in Bastogne taken before the two devastating Luftwaffe air raids on Christmas Eve. The Grand Rue – now the Rue du Vivier – leading north to Noville on the left, can be seen in the background. The sign in the middle of the square warns 'UNATTENDED VEHICLES WILL BE IMPOUNDED BY MILITARY POLICE', although at this time it was probably not being strictly enforced. German shelling and bombing destroyed 250 homes and damaged 450 more making them uninhabitable. In addition to the property damage, 782 Belgian citizens were killed.



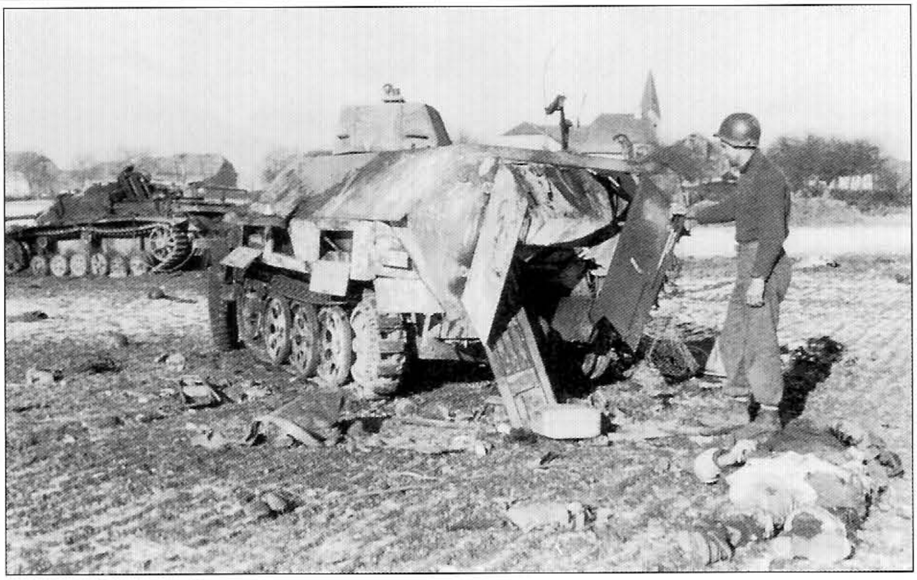
An M32B1 Armored Recovery Vehicle rolls up the Grand Rue – now the Rue du Sablon– after the Christmas Eve bombing raids. Ironically, Adolf Hitler travelled this same street on 17 May 1940, when he visited von Rundstedt's headquarters which were located in Bastogne during the Blitzkrieg in the West.



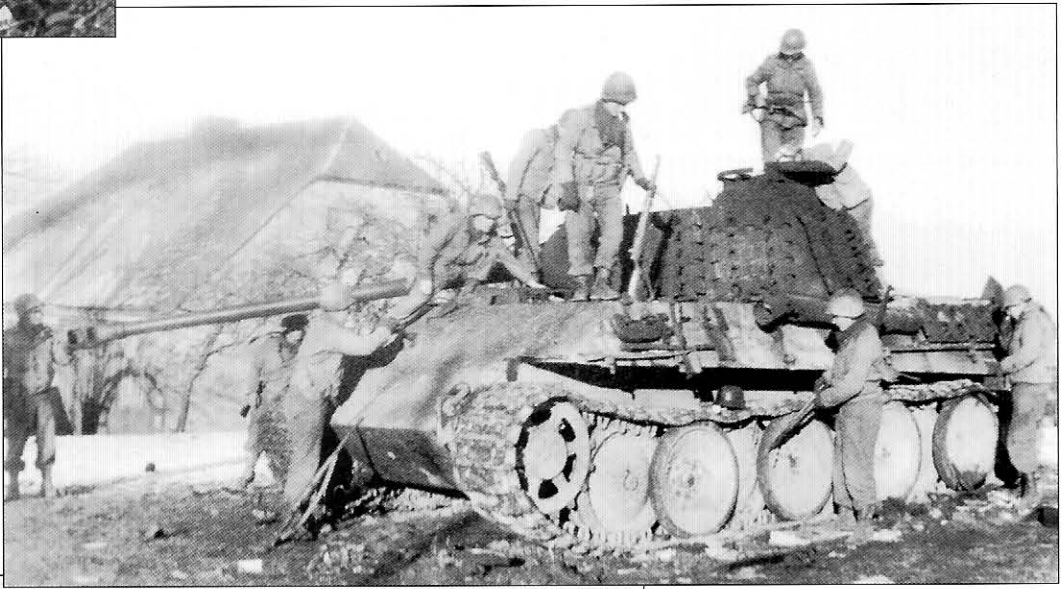
An M4A3 Sherman tank stands as a monument to the 4th Armored Division in Place McAuliffe in the center of Bastogne.

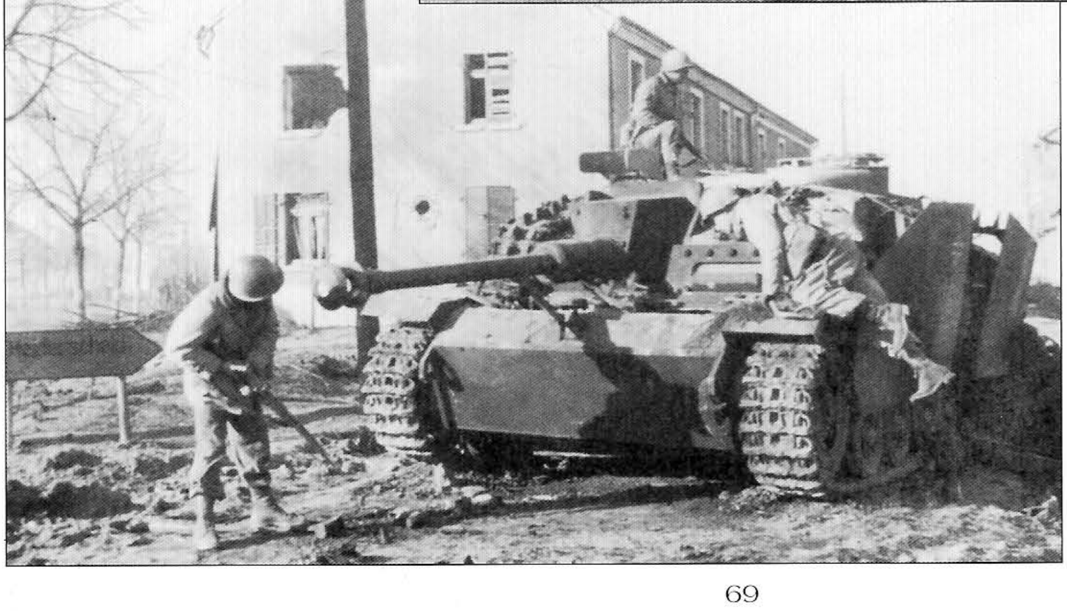


The Zugführer, or Platoon Leader, scans the terrain from a hull down position in his Sd.Kfz.251/1 Ausf.D half-track while the Panzer-Grenadiers huddle behind the protective embankment waiting for the order to advance. All appear to be wearing the splinter pattern camouflage Zeltbahn shelter quarter over their uniform. The goals of 212.Volks-Grenadier-Division at the start of the offensive were to advance across the Sûre River on either side of Echternach and occupy the high ground around Herborn and Mompach. They were then to form a defensive line from which they could make probing attacks in the hope of tying down as many American troops as possible.

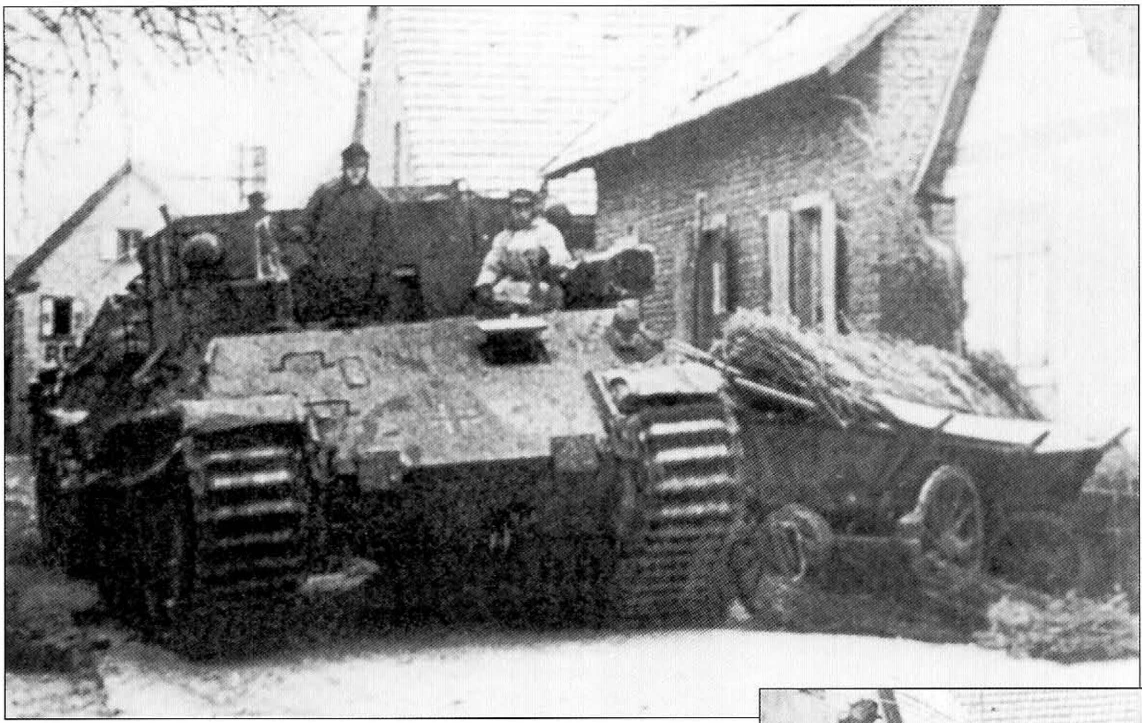


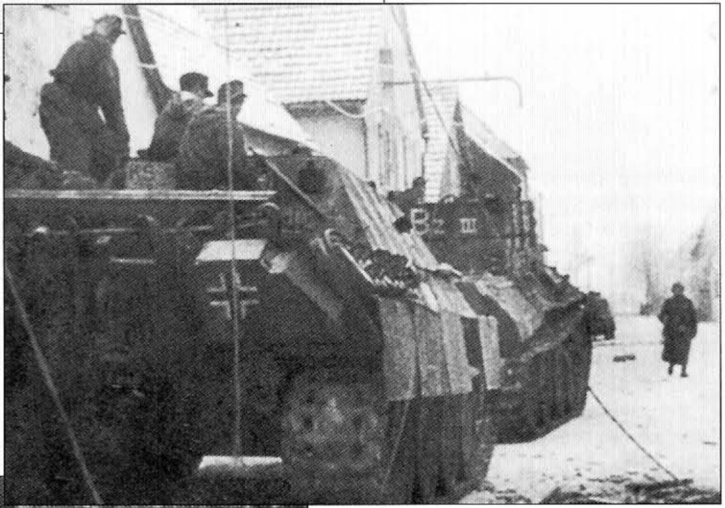
A StuG.III Ausf.G and an Sd.Kfz.251/17 Ausf.D half-track from the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade lie smashed on the outskirts of Heiderscheid after their unsuccessful attempt to drive out the 80th Infantry Division on Christmas Eve. The half-track is one of two such vehicles with the 2cm autocannon mounted in a small armored turret that were captured, one of which was the subject of a technical intelligence evaluation. The report indicated that both vehicles were badly damaged and burned as can be seen in this photograph.



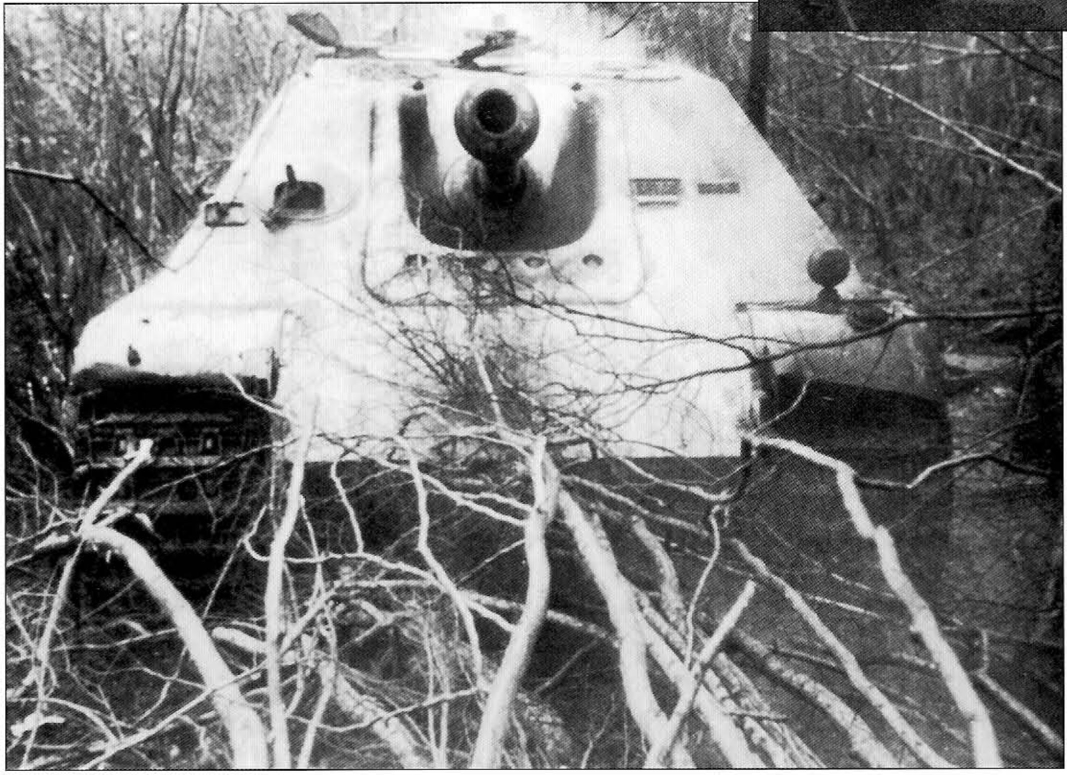


A burned out Panther Ausf.G and a late StuG.III Ausf.G from the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade, knocked out during the fighting at Heiderscheid, get a thorough inspection for souvenirs by a group of G.I.s on 26 December. The Führer-Grenadier-Brigade, held in OKW Reserve, was released to VII.Armee on 22 December and committed against the threat to their flank by Patton's III Corps advancing from the south. After slowly making its way through the heavy congestion of traffic trying to cross the Sûre River at Pont, they met the American drive in piecemeal units instead of at full strength and were unable to stem the advance.



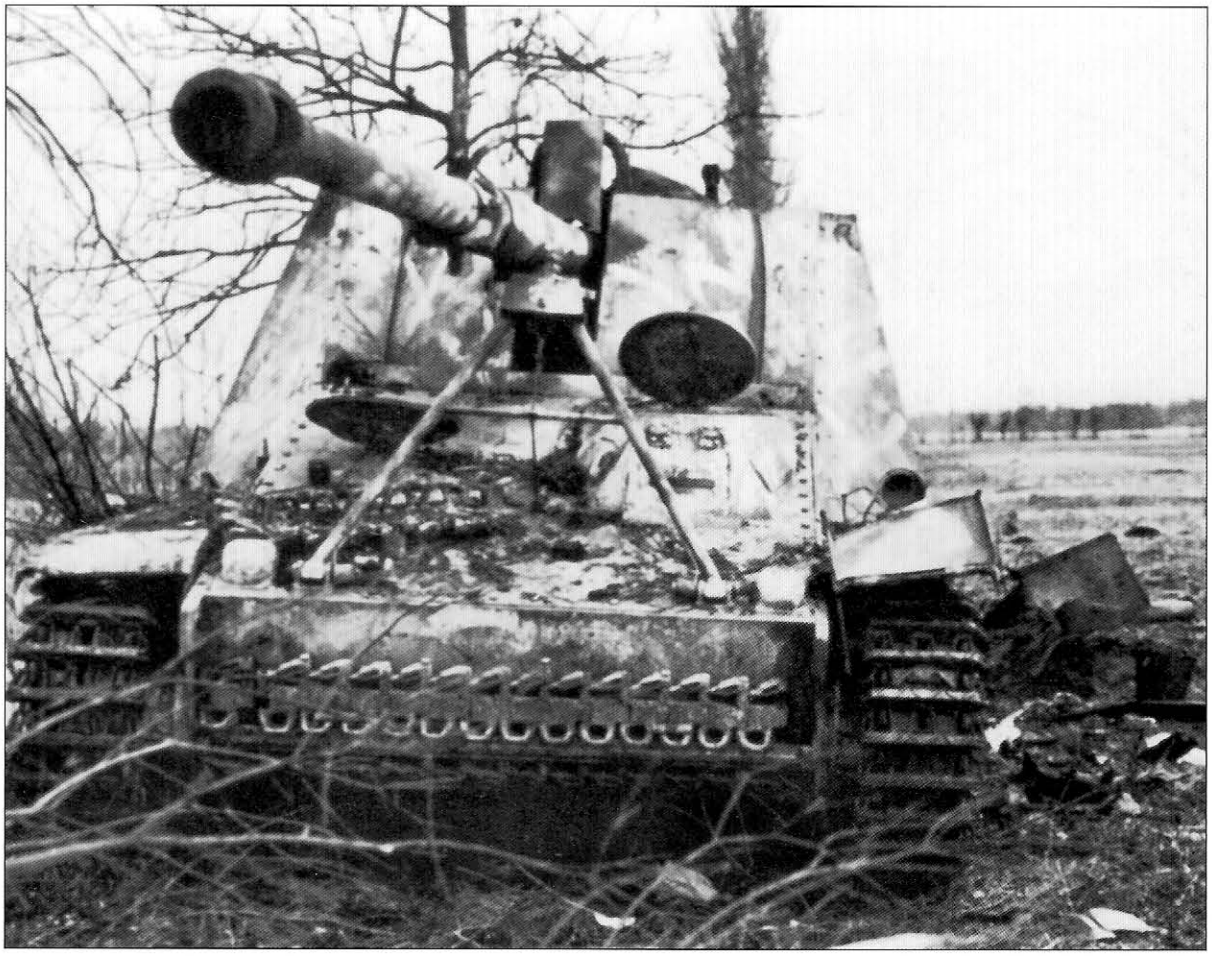


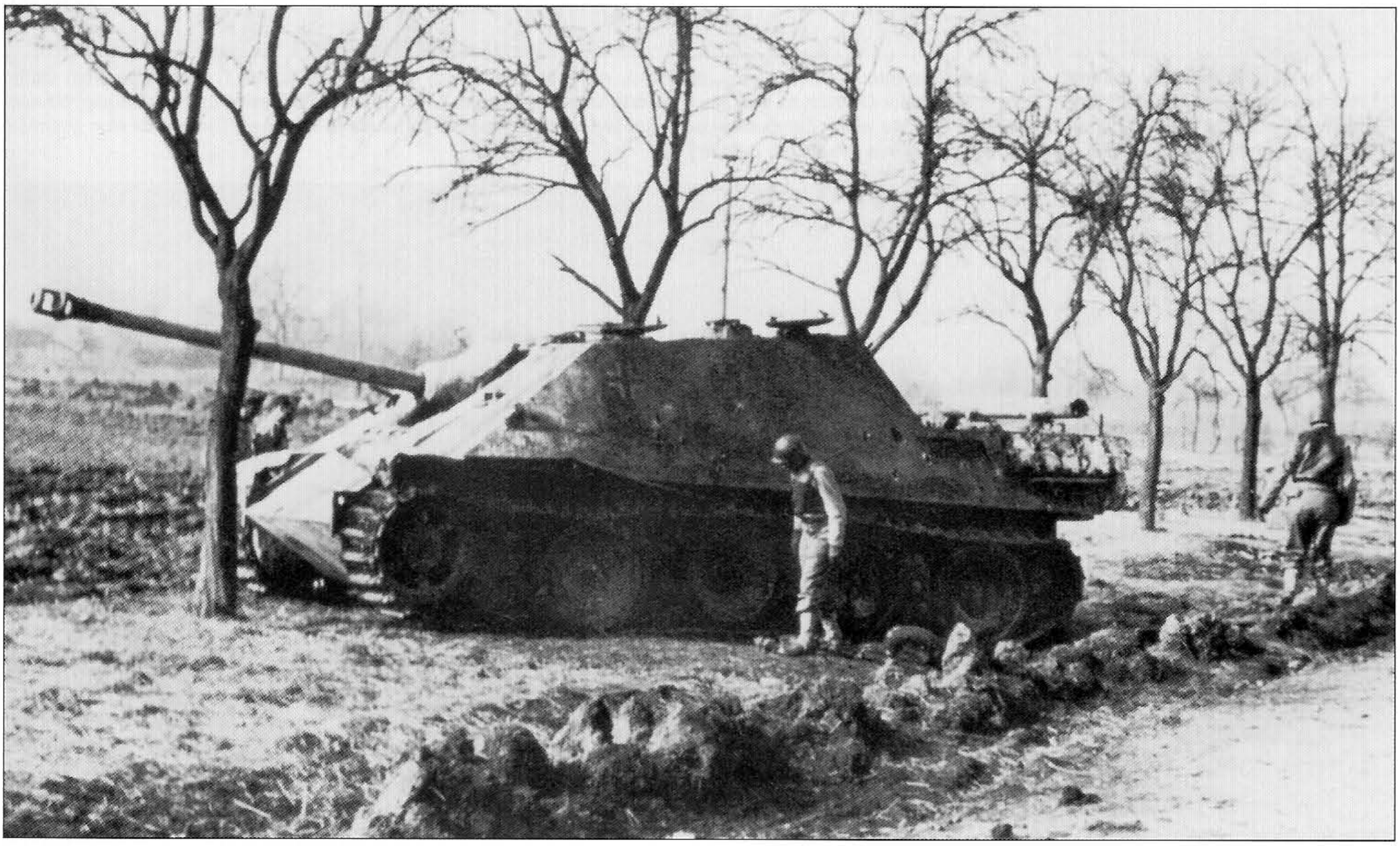
On New Year's Eve, the German Army opened a second offensive aimed at the northern Alsace region with the goal of recapturing Strasbourg. If successful, Hitler felt it would provide a boost to the sagging morale of the German people in addition to relieving the pressure on Heeresgruppe B in the Ardennes. Here, a Bergepanther based on the Panther Ausf.D or Ausf.A chassis, tows a late model Jagdpanther from schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654 in the Colmar area of France. In addition to the standard black and white Balkenkreuz markings, the Bergepanther also has an unusual 'Bz III' painted on the back of the winch compartment.



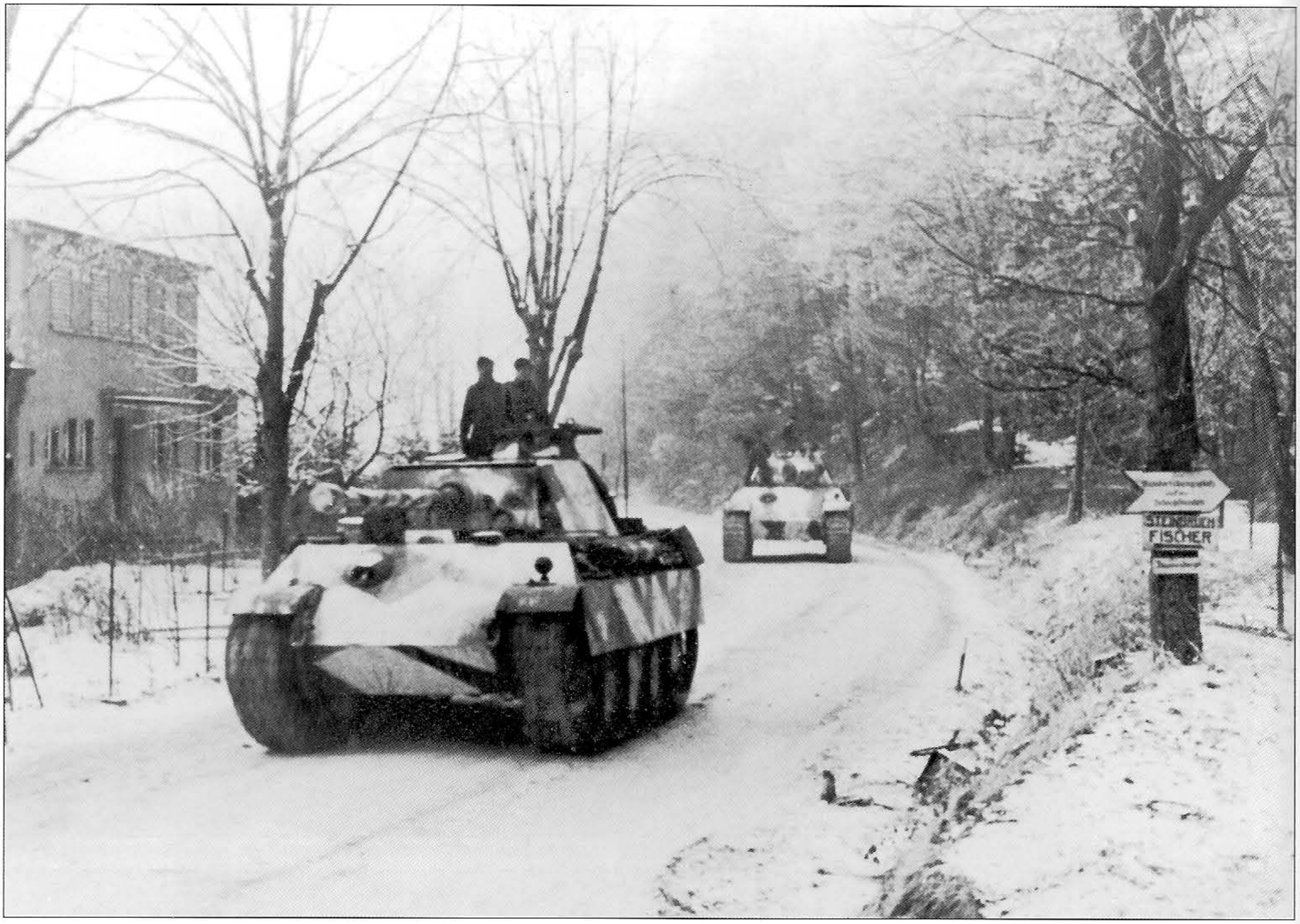
Another Jagdpanther from schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654 on 6 February 1945 near the village of Wolfgantzen. The broken trees indicate it had backed into an ambush position but was discovered and knocked out itstead by Shermans of the French First Army.

An 8.8cm PaK 43/1 (L71) Auf Fgst. Pz.Kpfw.III/IV (Sf), more commonly known as the Nashorn, knocked out by M10 tank destroyers of the French First Army near Riedwihr. It still carries a rough winter camouflage scheme of bold white criss-cross stripes over what appears to be a summer three color camouflage. It probably belonged to either s.Pz.Jg.Abt.93 or s.Pz.Jg.Abt.525, two units that were equipped with the Nashorn assigned to Heeresgruppe Oberrhein in the Colmar area.

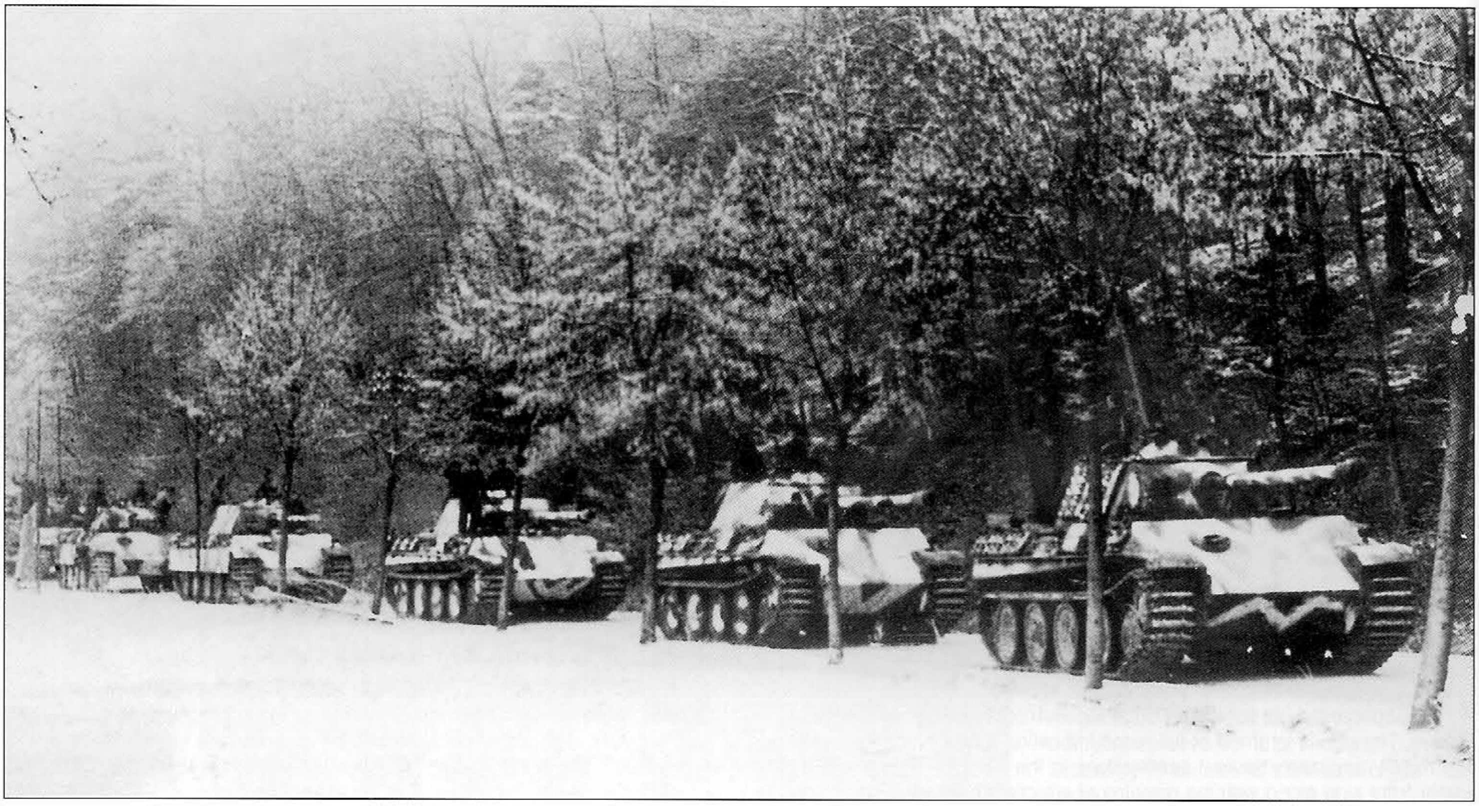




A Jagdpanther of schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654 lies alongside the road near Wickerschwihr after the French First Army had cleared the Colmar Pocket. The gun is jammed at full recoil indicating it was probably sabotaged by its crew after suffering a mechanical breakdown as the effects of a fuel fire are readily apparent. Several penetrations in the side armor of the hull can be seen as well. The black and white Balkenkreuz can be seen painted on the upper front side along with the remains of a tactical number '131'.



A column of Pz.Kpfw.V Panther Ausf.G advance through the Hagenauer Forest, north of Strasbourg, on 3 January 1945. They may be from either 21.Panzer-Division or Pz.Abt.5 from 25.Panzer-Grenadier-Division as they were the only units available to 1.Armee for the offensive that were equipped with Panthers. All seem to have a unique 'dazzle' style of white winter camouflage paint applied over their factory camouflage schemes. The middle sign attached to the tree on the right says 'Steinbruch Fischer' and points the way to a quarry.



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